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THE COLUMN

BORZOI JOURNALISM HANDBOOKS

To be published under the General Editorship of
Nelson Antrim Crawford

ADVERTISING AND THE NEWSPAPER
by W. F. G. Thacher

PRINTING AND THE JOURNALIST
by Eric W. Allen

WHAT IS NEWS?
Gerald W. Johnson

THE COLUMN
by Hallam W. Davis

BORZOI HANDBOOKS OF JOURNALISM
EDITED BY NELSON A. CRAWFORD

THE COLUMN

By
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Professor of English
Kansas State Agricultural College

NEW YORK & LONDON
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1926

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FOREWORD

This book concerns itself exclusively with the so-called humorous column that appears on the editorial page of the American daily newspaper. No attempt whatever is made to discuss the whole of newspaper humor. Comic strips and comic sections are mentioned occasionally in comparison or contrast. Even the whims, the biographies, and the favorite neckties of America's best known columnists have been neglected.

The humorous column is still in its infancy. It may live and it may not. Any conclusions in regard to it must be cautiously protected by profound reservations. But it is precocious and promising. It has steadfastly refused to surrender its right to carry over to the readers the personality of the writer. It has frequently shown open contempt for newspaper policies. These things alone would make it quite worth writing about.

The author of this volume has attempted to give the reader a fair understanding of the so-called humorous column. (Estimations of the worth of columnists have been avoided.) He has tried to treat the column as a living, rapidly developing thing that is going to amount to something some day.

He believes that it may even keep the newspaper in the class of warm-blooded animals.

Much material has been quoted, but the reader is reminded that the reading of this book should be accompanied by the reading of many columns just off the press. Columns, like biscuits, are much pleasanter when they are hot. When they are warmed over—well, you know how difficult it is to coax that lightness back. It is assumed that the reader is himself interested in writing a column—or at least in contributing to one. The best way to learn to read is to try to learn to write.

Of all those who write for the gayety and the delectation of the nation, the newspaper columnist and his contributors have the least control over their brain children. The more brilliant the epigram, the wheeze, or the jingle, the sooner the "original" father is likely to lose his paternal rights. "Exchange" is a ravenous and predatory foster parent. To all the unknown and undetermined "original" authors of material used for illustration in this volume the author wishes to express his gratitude.

To the managing editors whose statements form the basis of Chapter III, and to the columnists who have kindly and sincerely contributed to the symposium in Chapter IV on the "mission" of the column, the author of this book is also deeply grateful.

Special thanks are due Arthur ("Bugs") Baer, Don Marquis, Keith Preston, Heywood Broun, Jay E. House, Marguerite Mooers Marshall, Man

Hatton (Russel M. Crouse), Richard Henry Little, Ted Robinson, and Jennie Small Owen for permission to use material from recent columns.

In the chapter on Column Verse (Chapter X) the poems *Referred, Nocturne, South Shore Lines, Emptys Cuming Back, Dope, Hunger,* and *September Villanelle* are reprinted from "Column Poets" (1924) by the kind permission of the publisher, Pascal Covici, Chicago. *Arms and the Column, Gardens,* and *Ballad of the Oubliette* are reprinted from "The So-Called Human Race" (1922), A. A. Knopf. *Reminder, A Lady of Troy, Discovery, Nouveau Roi,* and *Knowledge* are reprinted from the 1925 "Linebook," (selections from "A Line O' Type or Two"), by the courtesy of Richard Henry Little. By permission of and special arrangement with Doubleday, Page and Company *Why Don't You Do Something Big?, Frequently, Dove River Anthology,* and *To His Lyre* are reprinted from "Weights and Measures" (1917) and *The Tired Business Man's Song* and *Neo-Neoism* are reprinted from "By and Large" (1924).

H. W. D.

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THE COLUMN

I

The Newspaper and Humor

HE newspaper exists primarily for the purpose of telling succinctly the story of the day's events. This news may be of general interest, as is the record of crime, accident, or war; or it may be of special interest, as is the story of a baseball game or a flurry in the stock exchange. Whatever it is, one may be sure that the average reader picks up his paper primarily to find out what has happened during the past day or two along the lines of human activity in which he is interested.

However, while one is devoting his daily fifteen minutes or his Sunday hour to the paper, he does not object to being entertained now and then by interesting material that is not exactly news. We find the larger metropolitan papers filled—sometimes more than filled—with feature stories, light essays, fiction, pictures, poetry, and comic strips. It would be painful to enumerate all the things that one might discover in a big Sunday paper. Spend two or three hours listing and classifying the material in next Sunday's edition of your favorite daily, and you will

learn much about the varied interests of such people as yourself.

The human mind is so constituted that it must have diversion. Men crave entertainment for their minds and for their emotional selves. No matter how much one may be interested in the search of news that is both interesting and important, one likes to turn aside for an interesting story, a joke, or a bit of pictured comedy. The average newspaper reader also likes a bit of comment and opinion upon the happenings of the day or upon matters of current or lasting interest.

The editorial page is intended for those who wish to consider as well as learn. What portion of newspaper readers acquire the habit of reading an editorial or two and glancing about at the other material on the page is, of course, not definitely known. It is easy enough to make surveys and get figures, but is hard to make sure that the figures tell the truth. But whatever the percentage is, the readers of the editorial page constitute the cream of the circulation, the people of the community whose good will is worth getting and holding.

But even such serious-minded folk must have their bit of diversion. So the editor-in-chief sometimes arranges for some strictly literary material, a feature article of literary flavor, a poem, a book review, scattered epigrams, and maybe a so-called "humorous column." In times past the more conservative papers of the country have kept their trust in the fairly long, serious editorial and have scorned the brief

"wheeze" and the poem and the light article that catch the roving eye. But of late there has been a marked tendency to dress up the editorial page a bit for the delectation of the lover of literature and humor.

The most important development on America's editorial pages during the past quarter of a century has been the evolution of the "colyum." Perhaps only by a doubtful common consent can it be called humorous. It merely pursues the light, humorous muse, whoever she is, more often than not. It does not follow any mood or seek any goal earnestly and invariably, except that it trails rather closely in the wake of the ego of the column conductor. Usually the column conductor chooses to seem to be unserious. Consequently the public often considers the column humorous.

But the humorous column, even though it is yet young, and in spite of the fact that it is still steadfastly ignored by some of America's most influential papers, has popularized itself securely. It has also made a place for itself that is almost unique—if we can persuade "unique" to allow its meaning to be qualified a tiny bit. Due to the hold some column conductors have got upon their reading publics, editors-in-chief and managing editors have found it advisable, even necessary, to absolve them from the constricting "policy" of the paper and allow them to print largely, if not entirely, just what they please to print.

In such places, or rather in such columns, we find

the sole remaining example of the entirely free editorial expression of opinion in American papers. Of course the columnist is not freed from the necessity of pleasing his public, but he does not have to please the editor-in-chief every day; and he may or may not conform to the current editorial program for the day, or the week, or the season. It is recognized that free play for the columnist's individuality, his whims and fancies, is essential to the life of the column. If his individuality is of the positive, pleasing kind that recruits followers in spite of almost everything, those who control the destinies of the paper are loath to restrict him.

Humorous column material is not new to newspapers, or new to literature. It is a conglomeration of epigrams, jokes, jingles, light verses, humorous mottoes, short editorials, short essays, paragraphs, anecdotes, reminiscence, satire, and good-humored invective. The column may be a good light essay broken up by two-em dashes. It may be the silliest of jingle and drivel. It is often devoted to criticism of books, or of music or art or politics, or of anything that is troubling the public mind. It may be filled almost entirely with contributions from the followers. The column defies classification. It has been correctly named. It is merely a column.

But there is one thing that all *good* columns have, and have in abundance. That thing is the "individuality" or "personality" or "ego" of the columnist. If this indefinable thing is pleasing and positive and challenging, the column's success is assured.

There are good columns with much jingle and verse; there are columns just as good that never run a line of verse. There are good columns that are "high-brow" and good columns that are "lowbrow." There are good columns that are totally disjointed, and good columns that are merely essays a column long. There is no end to the contrasts that one could find. But all good columns bear the imprint of the ego of the columnist, an ego that is a live thing, much to be reckoned with.

The column is sometimes personal and meddlesome. It is the most human thing in the newspaper of today. Hence it is likely to be the goal of the ambitions of a hopelessly large number of young newspaper men. Judging from the past and the present, the newspaper reading world will never show a tendency to welcome a large number of columnists. Unless columnists are very, very good, they are quite likely to be considered horrid. Their tenure of office is usually based on extraordinary success in pleasing an intensely finicky reading public. They must be positively good, or they are no good at all.

Poets are born, not made, they say. Columnists are both born and made. Notwithstanding the fact that they are necessarily born first, it is impossible to tell whether one has been born until it is definitely proved that he has been made. Consequently, although there is a possible hope that anybody may develop into a good columnist, there is a probable hope for only a few. This volume may help those

who might wish sometime to try to write a column or contribute to one. The author does not have the slightest suspicion that anything or any one can make a column writer of just anybody; but he does harbor a hope that something can be done to help the right body.

This volume has another hope for itself. It hopes that it will be of help in teaching people to read columns. The newspaper, which used to be an entirely human thing, has involved itself with "styles" and "policies" to the point where it is almost entirely un-human—except for the column. The news columns are dehumanized by the style sheets and by the impersonal (but often colored) news policy. The editorials are tinted by an editorial policy. Feature stories must not offend the tastes and the sanctions of supposed groups of readers.

News, editorials, and feature stories in the average "big" daily all show the overpowering influence of the advertising department, denials to the contrary notwithstanding. But the best "colyums" —those that are talked about—are entirely free. They are not part and parcel of the big corporation that produces the newspaper. They are the whims and the grouches and the delights of the writer. When they lose their humanness, they are done as columns.

More people should write columns and more people should read them. They contribute to the health and sanity of thinking. As a rule they

champion common sense and laugh absurdity out of court. The good reporter and the good feature writer do not encourage us to inquire into things. Even the editorial writer does not often ask us to look on both sides. But the columnist is ever flipping things upside down and wrong side out and inviting us to look and laugh—and think, even.

II

The Business of Humor

IFE, as has been remarked several million times, is a funny proposition. From the cradle to the grave almost everybody laughs at almost everybody else. Nine times out of ten the person laughed at is supposed to be guilty of some absurdity or inferiority that has just been discovered by the person who laughs. We laugh at the babe because of its futile efforts to control arms and legs and eyes. We laugh at the three-year-old child because of its awkward attempts to talk. We laugh at the schoolboy and the schoolgirl. We laugh at the young man in love and the young woman in love—we laugh at anybody in love. We laugh at the newlywed. Get anybody or anything in an absurd predicament, show us the absurdity, and unless our censor is right on the job, we laugh.

We tend to be amused whenever we recognize inferiority or departure from the normal—which is a sort of inferiority—in others. It makes no difference whether this inferiority is that of a clown whose face has just been plastered with custard pie or that of a college professor who in preparing to go to bed has washed the cat's teeth and kicked himself out the back door—we laugh as soon as we be-

come conscious of the absurdity or the inferiority. We laugh at the bride who doesn't know which side of an egg to fry. If we could understand relativity, we should laugh at everybody else on earth.

Particularly is America's appetite for the humorous insatiable. Newspapers daily sacrifice priceless space to run comic strips that can at best edify only the minds of children and immature grown-ups. Some magazines devote themselves entirely to humor. Practically all magazines give some of their space to it. Hundreds of books of humor stream from the press every year.

Much of the popularity of sports is due to the fact that they offer opportunity for humorous situations. Someone is always telling about "funny" things that happened at the baseball game or the football game or at the boxing bout. Most of our national pastimes have their clowns, whose antics we remember long after we have forgotten the score.

In home, school, business, and society the joke and the joker are sought after, and the funny thing is remembered after the commonplace or serious thing is forgotten. Somehow or other America has got entirely accustomed to life's clowns darting unceremoniously from the wings, seizing the show, and making off with it in a shocking and irreverent manner.

Humor is an important thing, for otherwise there would not be so much of it. It is not strange that newspapers have undertaken to satisfy some of

America's craving for humor. Americans want their fun every day—they cannot wait for the weekly issues of such magazines as *Life* and *Judge.* When they have glanced over the headlines on the front page and read the society notes or the sports, they turn to the "funnies." If readers are of a more serious sort, they turn to the editorial page, where they can find a bit of comment on the "goings-on" in the world. But even the serious ones do not want all the comment to be serious. They like at least a column of lighter editorializing. Thus we find the "colyum" endeavoring to satisfy the demand for humor of those who prefer to think their fun rather than see it.

The reader of the "colyum" expects wit and humor and satire. He expects to get a laugh once in a while and a smile quite often. He wants his superiority appealed to. He wants to know of the mistakes that other people are making. If congress, or the president, or the governor is "getting by" with something absurd, he expects his favorite columnist to throw on the spotlight of truth. If the literary folk are making asses of themselves, he expects his humor agent to make plain their asininity. Wherever there is absurdity that appeals to the mind as well as the eye, he expects the columnist to go.

There are, as has been said, many good columns that can be called humorous only by a considerable stretch of the imagination. Among these are the critical column (usually book or art or drama re-

view) and the reminiscent column. These are, however, not truly representative of the "colyum" as the newspaper reader conceives it, for he expects it to contain an appreciable portion of humor.

Whether you consider it strange or not strange, the abundance of humor in the world and its ever-presentness have not acquainted people with its methods and habits. People do not analyze feelings of pleasure. When we laugh, it is enough that we laugh. Just why we laugh, we do not care to know.

The question, "What is funny?" is a question to be studied slowly and patiently. The best way to study it is to cultivate the habit of noting all things that people laugh or smile at. The quickest way to get started is to concentrate upon those things that are intentionally and admittedly humorous—comic strips, humorous columns, anecdotes, epigrams, conversation jokes, and cartoons in the newspapers; all the material in magazines devoted to humor; the humor sections of other magazines; humorous books; the greater part of vaudeville and burlesque; all straight comedy and musical comedy; and, last but not least, comedy in the movies.

Here is certainly a well-equipped, extensive, and interesting laboratory for the student of humor. Couple it up with life itself, and the possibilities of investigation are unlimited. And not only the writer of humor should make the study; the reader of humor should study also, in order that his power of appreciation may be increased.

Of course, the best and the final analysis of humor each individual must make for himself, for no one dare tell me or you just what is funny. However, there are a few lines that can be roughly drawn to mark off plots of different varieties of humor more or less easily recognizable.

Humor depends frequently upon contrast: the broader the contrast, the louder the laugh. Mutt and Jeff are often funny merely because one is tall and the other short. Walt and Skeezix go nicely together because they are anything but well matched physically. A 130-pound man with a 200-pound wife is likely to be laughed at, no matter how seriously and how sadly he may reflect upon his misery.

Vaudeville pairs, dancing teams, and circus clowns make a crude but effective use of the principle of contrast. The amateur fun-maker and the professional humorist both depend upon contrast much more than they know. It is an interesting experiment to sit down and list the number of things that are laughable chiefly because they present ludicrously paired extremes.

But contrast need not be confined to the physical. The dull-witted and the clever person make just as good a combination as the fat and the lean. The quick-wit and the dunderpate also go well together. The dominant wife and the meek husband furnish another good contrast for joke, cartoon, comic strip, or vaudeville skit; and besides the contrast, this combination offers a reversal of the well-

disseminated superstition that the man is the head of the house.

Extremes without their opposites also have their element of humor. A good example is the clown on tall stilts with trouser legs eight or ten feet long. The village fat boy, the human bean pole, the very talkative person, the very slow person, the very "anything" person, all illustrate the humor of extremes which are funny in themselves.

Obvious extremes doubtless furnish the basis for most humor. If the public gets a view of anything physical that is far from the normal, it is likely to burst out in open laughter. If the extreme is a matter of manner or style, the amusement is deeper but not so loud. If the extreme is one of thinking or of character, it may pass unnoticed by most folks. The more subtle the distinction, the fewer the people who will smile. A joke that is too subtle puts the reader or hearer in the position of an inferior; and no one ever laughs from a suspicion of his own inferiority.

Man also laughs at whatever is unusual. This is why fads and fashions are so often the subjects of satire. When bobbed hair started on its daring career, the professional humorists went to it as geese to water. Nowadays the funny thing is the girl with long hair. Fashion jokes are sure-fire, provided the fashion is still young. Unusualness in thinking is considered funny, just as is unusualness in clothes or hair-dressing. Fads in medicine are just as good subjects for the shafts of a humorist

as are furs in July or sleeveless dresses in January. Let a preacher announce a sermon on blighted romances or on choosing a wife, and everybody has trouble in repressing a smile.

Whatever is absurd is funny. Anything flatly opposed to the manifest truth gives the reader a sense of superiority, for it makes evident to him his own sanity. If you were suddenly to strike a grandiose attitude and tell me that the Mikado had resigned and asked you to take his place, I should probably have to laugh whether I thought you were sincere or joking. When little black Sambo finishes up his adventures with a little lunch of 169 pancakes, the reader cannot but smile. Clowning under the tent or on the stage is one long pursuit of the absurd. That the moon is made of green cheese is the most popular piece of absurdity ever conceived.

The finest type of humor, however, is based on departure from common sense. If humor plays upon a man's satisfaction with his own common sense and superiority, it must hint to him that somebody else's thinking is inferior to his own. There is nothing that satisfies us so fully as the conviction that our own minds are superior to the minds of at least a few other people. We laugh at the graduating high school boy when he explains to us how he is going to handle the world a bit differently, for we see the mistakes in his thinking. We have trouble in suppressing our glee when some pair of newlyweds confide in us the great secret that they have arranged it all so that no differences of opinion

can ever come up in their married life. We laugh at the dreamer who has a plan for reorganizing civilization or business so that everybody will be happy and satisfied.

The delight of Irish jokes often lies in the lack of perception displayed by Pat or Mike at some particular moment of excitement. The village half-wit is humorous because he cannot think even as well as the villagers. The dullard in school used to be adorned with a fool's cap and parked in a corner so that the clear-thinking students might look at him and laugh at him. Nowadays the backward child's chief objection to being put in a "boob" section of the class is that the other students will laugh at him.

The humorist's business is the pursuit of the illogical, the absurd, the unusual, the extreme, and the contrasting. He must have common sense, in order that he may discover uncommon sense. He must have a fine nose for the normal, just as the good reporter must have a fine nose for the interesting; for the normal is the point of departure for all humor.

It is the business of humor—it has a business—to restore life to the normal. More often than not humor is unconscious of its aim. It loses much of its effectiveness when it becomes conscious of its purpose. A sense of humor is nothing more or less than a headful of common sense in action, unconsciously endeavoring to keep the world sane. Unlike reform, it refuses to take itself seriously, but always assumes the garb of the clown and always maintains that nothing matters very much. The

humorist and the reformer are sworn enemies, marching fist to fist toward goals that may not be far apart.

One has only to consider the attacks of humor on fad and fashion to see that it preaches the doctrine of normality and reasonableness. The humorist will stand for shoe heels one or two inches high, but if they become three or four inches high he buzzes forth and calls his brother wasps into action. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, when men's collars were so stiff and so high as to endanger men's ears, humorists turned their attention from the foibles of women's fashions—as unbelievable as that may seem—and devoted their attention to the cause of comfortable necks for men. The only reason why women's clothes are satirized more than men's is that they run from extreme to extreme more than men's do, being consistent only in their aversion to normality.

Wit and humor are just as quick to attack social customs, professional practices, and new movements in government, education, or religion as they are to attack shorter short skirts and lower low necks. Look through the magazines of humor and the columns of humor in the daily press for a week or so. You will be surprised to see how quickly comes the conviction that it is the business of humor to run along with life and keep it in the fairly straight and narrow path of common sense.

The highest and most worthy task of humor, however, is to keep thinking free from error and

faddishness. The best of newspaper columns devote themselves exclusively to this work. The columnists are the first to pounce upon new idealistic schemes of government, new religious cults, or the vaporings of self-elected uplifters and moralizers. Just as soon as any individual begins taking himself and his plans too seriously, or just as soon as the world gets to taking him too seriously, the columnists go for him. It makes no difference by what means the enthusiast plans reform, whether by free soup, or free silver, or free verse, the humorists regard him as their prey.

American humorists of the past used the average, herd-minded man as their measuring stick. To a certain extent most humorists still do this, and always will do it. Common sense means sense that is common among people, and the majority will always look upon itself as the only sane thing on earth. However, there has of late been a strong tendency on the part of psychologists and philosophers and other leaders of thought to inquire critically into the thinking of the mob. These men are beginning to tell us that many of the cherished opinions and approvals and sanctions of the herd-minded man have a questionable ancestry and a doubtful value. Though they may rightly be called common sense, they cannot rightly be called good sense.

The revolt against conventional thinking is too recent and too well known to need discussion. Novels, dramas, and poems galore bear witness to it. Some people have grown suspicious of all group

thinking, and would toss it all away and try for a new start. While it is true that these extremists are good targets for the average humorist, it is also true that some of the best and the keenest satirists have selected the blindly conservative, herd-minded Babbitt as a target and are making rare sport of him. So attractive has been this departure that the leading satirists have turned from making sport of the type that is far from average and have gone into the business of pointing out the foibles of the average man, the good old sane and safe John Public. By so doing they have made an even more subtle appeal to the superiority instinct in the reader.

A few decades ago Artemus Ward, Bill Nye, and to a rather large extent Mark Twain, were manufacturing their fun out of short-haired women and long-haired men. They used exaggeration to get the extreme, the absurd example to work on; and then they had their fun. The Babbitts, the business "successes," and the "service" worshipers of that day were not molested. No one thought of saying anything critical about the average man. No one thought of satirizing the apparent possessor of the elemental virtues, who kept one foot, at least, in the straight and narrow path, and who stood valiantly by all the organizations he belonged to until death him and them did part.

Such a condition does not prevail today. The satirist is *against* the strict "party man" rather than *for* him. The words "boob," "yokel," and "moron" are undeniably abroad in the land; and Babbitt

and Babbittry are beginning to be spelled with lower case "b's." What does it mean? Simply that the humorists are beginning to inquire into the thinking and the actions of the heretofore wholly respectable and unsuspected John Public. They wish to see whether what has always been called common sense may not also have absurdities in it.

But the great bulk of humor will doubtless continue to anchor itself to the average all-wool-and-a-yard-wide citizen, and beginning humorists will do well to consider him as a paragon and not as a target. Most humor twists us back to common sense. To go on from common sense to good sense is rather a daring attempt for a beginner.

III

The Managing Editor's Idea

T is not at all difficult to forget that the newspaper is primarily for the purpose of collecting and disseminating news. Indeed, it is very easy to forget it. Recent changes in both the appearance and the subject-matter of the newspaper might reasonably lead one to think that its chief purpose is to entertain people who have voracious appetites for scrambled bits of everything. The many new features that have lately been added to newspapers are likely to obscure from the ordinary mortal the chief aim and end of the paper, which has been, is, and will always be, the dissemination of news.

Editors-in-chief and managing editors continue to be concerned chiefly with news gathering and news dissemination. They do not seem to regard "features" of any kind as being of elemental importance in their business. In spite of the speed with which a deluge of special features has been dashed upon newspapers recently, editors as a rule remain unmoved. It is very likely true that most of the recent departures have been accepted somewhat reluctantly.

Managing editors are always interested in people *en masse*. They are naturally inclined to measure everything by the obvious mass reaction it secures. This explains why a news story with an element of scandal will get a more prominent position and more space than an important but fairly respectable disagreement at a parent-teachers association meeting; and it also makes it easy to guess why the cheap comic strip makes a quick and appreciable appeal to large groups of people. The finer types of humor do not appeal to so great a number and do not arouse so voluble an enthusiasm in those to whom they do appeal.

It is just possible, of course, that the managing editors of newspapers are jealous of their news columns, and that they regard all features, pictures, and comic strips as orphans or undesirable aliens, with only a questionable right to live on the earnings of news.

Managing editors are not agreed as to the mission of the humorous column on the editorial page. They are inclined to regard it somewhat as they regard a comic strip or other special feature. They seem not to have given its progress and possibilities a great amount of analytical consideration. The humorous column pleases a goodly number of subscribers, and interests folks in the paper, some of them even to the point of making them contributors to the column—and that is enough. If it does that much, why inquire or worry about it further?

Of course, there is perhaps no good reason why

the management of the newspaper should think much about this increasingly popular editorial-page feature. If it interests more people in the editorials and if it makes firm and lasting friends for the paper, there is no reason to be further concerned about its actual purpose and its actual workings.

Nobody yet dares to be profound in regard to the column, for it has not fully established itself, determined its characteristics, or found its place. The first column of importance in an American newspaper, Eugene Field's "Sharps and Flats," undoubtedly set too high a literary standard for the comfort of succeeding columnists. Few columnists since Field's time have been able to equal his efforts, and none of them has equalled him consistently. Only a very few indeed have made great names for themselves.

But maybe this is giving a wrong impression of the editor's attitude toward the columnist and his column. The managing editors of course cannot be expected to think about a column as does the column writer or the column fan. It is not that managing editors are opposed in any particular way or any particular degree to the humorous column, or that they are unsympathetic with it. They are primarily concerned with another type of writing, and it is only natural that they should not be thinking much about the future and the possibilities of the column.

One recent bit of promotion activity in the newspaper world would seem to indicate, however, that

newspaper managers are taking their columnists much more seriously than they ordinarily pretend to. In an exchange of columnists in New York the *World* secured the services of Heywood Broun; and immediately the *World* used a great deal of billboard space to tell the citizens of New York of the fact. There is a very great likelihood that before many decades newspapers will be featuring their columns along with their comic strips.

However, let the managing editors speak for themselves. As a rule they seem to be agreed on the following points:

1. That columns must amuse.

2. That they are *rather* widely read and that they have some influence on public opinion.

3. That column material as a rule is less dignified than other material in the newspaper.

4. That the column is not essential to the success of the paper; but that the right kind of column, however, is worth the space it occupies.

5. That the columnist must be far above the average newspaper writer in literary background, mental alertness, word and sentence manipulation, and abstract thinking.

Doubtless the best way to understand what managing editors think about humorous columns is to derive conclusions directly from what some of the editors themselves have to say. Here are passages from letters written by managing editors of representative papers in America. For obvious reasons their names and the names of their papers

are withheld. It is to be noted, first of all, that these representative newspaper men both do and do not agree. It should be noted, too, that some of them have thought sympathetically about humorous columns and that others seem a bit indifferent.

This is from the managing editor of one prominent Mid-West paper that carries no humorous column:

The fact that we have had no such column for a great many years indicates, of course, that we do not regard it as a necessity. I do not say that we would not publish such a column were it good enough. It is pretty difficult for any writer to fill an entire column or even a half column each day with scintillating remarks. I rather incline to the idea of keeping the editorial page open for articles that call for thought or supply information. I do not say that I would not run a humorous column if exigencies demand it.

The editor of a dignified and highly respected paper on the Atlantic seaboard says that it is the business of the column "to be the soubrette in what is of necessity a sort of 'problem play.' " His paper runs no column.

Running back to mid-America, we find the manager of a paper that has become a real institution in its section of the United States saying that the column "gives a place for brief, light and frothy stuff which has properly no place in the news columns or in the editorial." He adds that "in the

past much of the material that goes under this classification was paragrapher's work in the editorial column."

Here is the voice of a managing editor from the North, in the Great Lakes region:

The mission of the humorous paragraphs in newspapers, I should say, is primarily to amuse. They can be made effective weapons against abuses and derelicts at times, but first of all they must amuse, and that is a very high mission, for really wholesome amusement is scarce. It is very much harder to find than preaching. Good, homely paragraphs are well worth their space.

There is an implication in all of these statements that the column is a sort of stray cat in the newspaper home—to be tolerated as long as it amuses the family and doesn't scratch fiercely enough to hurt anybody's feelings. This point of view is without doubt a natural and justifiable one. It indicates that the column has not yet made itself an essential —has not yet won its spurs. It is the viewpoint of conservative individuals who believe that a newspaper is a newspaper and not a magazine of humorous, entertaining, and informative features. One feels instinctively that these statements do not come from column fans.

Other editors are inclined to consider the column a bit more favorably. They evidently have accepted the stray cat and found him to be a good mouser. Note the tone of complete acceptance and

justification in the following, from the managing editor of a big Chicago daily:

Inasmuch as humor and the spirit of fun play their significant and beneficial part in all normal life, it seems to me to be obvious that, as a mirror of life, a newspaper should give some place to a column for humor or lighter comment on the news or on the passing phases of life. For many years we have given some space to more or less frivolous paragraphs; sometimes to witty or pointed comment on the news.

And for about twenty years, under one conductor or another, we have had a full column of such matter, including playful paragraphs, satirical or purely facetious comment; and verse, sometimes comical, sometimes serious.

At some times the column is better than at others. The intention is to make it always amusing or at least cheerful. Evidently, to judge from correspondence received, there is an interest in such a column among the readers.

Here is another bit of guarded, but cordial welcome to the humorous column. It comes from Georgia:

The humorous column is not published by newspapers as a feature having a "mission," but merely because there seems to be a growing demand on the part of the American newspaper reading public for matter of this kind.

Just as a salad course is not added to a menu for the purpose of building brain and brawn, but chiefly to tickle the palate, so the humor column of a daily newspaper is merely an added attraction.

This does not mean that such a department, composed of clean humor, is not beneficial, because there is no question or doubt that anything that will put the reader in a better frame of mind, will have its beneficial results upon his life and upon those with whom he comes in contact.

The managing editor of a New York daily, famed for its columns, takes the column still more seriously and makes a distinction that columnists should note closely and thoughtfully:

There are two kinds of newspaper columns. One is merely the whimsical type, without a philosophy or purpose, while the other is the product of a real critic of life, having a definite point of view to serve. The latter type of column to my mind is the better.

In a large city a column should and often does fill the function of neighborhood gossip. It creates individualities and brings news into the gossip.

A prominent Ohio editor calls attention to the importance of the "contrib" as an important phenomenon in the hurried evolution of the column:

The humorous column is not the product of the director alone. In fact, it is largely made up of

contributions from people who have an urge to write jokes, funny verses, and what not. There are more people with this urge than you would think. The humorous column gives them a means of expression and therefore makes additional friends for the newspaper.

It is my observation of newspaper columns generally that there is an increasing tendency to combine philosophical observations and comments with the more conventional type of newspaper joke and humorous verse. Sometimes the humor is not very funny and the philosophy not very philosophical, but on the whole there are signs of progress. Reading Josh Billings, M. Quad, Petroleum V. Nasby, Artemus Ward and others who either were newspaper humorists or of that general class leads one to the conviction that, after all, perhaps the world is growing better.

A Southern editor makes the following distinction and expresses a natural, human preference entirely uninfluenced by his business and his job:

It seems to me that the question is divided into two parts; the value of a circulation-getting column with local names and events, or the value of a well-written, truly humorous feature that can be enjoyed for itself alone. Of the two, I much prefer the latter. The ideal will be a combination of the two, which is exceedingly rare.

All of these editors evidently feel that the humorous column has come to stay—for a while, at least.

They are already thinking of the column in terms of a bigger, steadier, and happier circulation. They believe that the column gives the public something that it needs, wants, and has a right to. They betray a more or less marked fondness for columns and a more than professional interest in them.

The following excerpts from letters from two managing editors—one in San Francisco and one in Chicago—show, respectively, a warm friendship and an exceptional appreciation of the two columns in the two papers. These replies represent the farthest inroads that columns have made into the hearts of the bosses, and lead one to believe that the column, as an institution, already has a "mission" and a permanent home.

Our columnist, like many other features of the paper, is different. He does not confine himself to humor, but every once in a while breaks out in sentiment, and gets away with it.

He is widely read and his mail is voluminous.

He can sting a fellow and make him like it, and he writes of immortality like an expert and at that he is an evolutionist.

His mission is to provide the dessert for the day's repast.

He writes in the language of the people and they apparently appreciate it.

I have been associated with the work of writers of humorous columns for a great many years and have known with some degree of intimacy the work

of Eugene Field, George Ade, Bert Leston Taylor, Franklin P. Adams, Keith Preston, and others. It is my conviction that men of this type, all of whom have made permanent reputations as humorists, have tried to express truths in a way both illuminating and beneficial to the public. They found in humor a vehicle for conveying ideas expressive of human nature as it actually exists. There is no better medium for the stripping away of every sham and every form of make-believe than sarcasm deftly and wisely wielded.

The newspaper column in capable hands serves the admirable purpose of drawing out from large numbers of clever folk wise and witty observations which, contributed to the column, add greatly to its value as a chronicle of events viewed with mirthful frankness. I take it, therefore, that the well-conducted newspaper column is in effect a daily interval of inspiring gossip in which frivolity and wisdom are mingled in a way to give to the appreciative reader both inspiration and refreshment.

It follows, of course, that the conductor of such a column should be a man of wide reading, sound principles, and quick and accurate perceptions. Given such a man, you have as a daily product something notable, something well worth while.

The managing editor's attitude toward the column doubtless represents the newspaper management's view more exactly than does any other official's attitude, for with the managing editor rests the responsibility for the general success of the paper. Although the demand for magazine material in the

newspapers has risen to entirely unexpected proportions during the past decade, it is very likely still true that the newspaper with the best news service, other things being fairly equal, has the most dependable circulation, if not the largest. Feature service of various sorts is new. It has had the advantage of high-powered promotion. It is still riding on the crest of the first big wave its own splash sent out. To overemphasize its importance would be very easy.

All this is offered in justification of the managing editor's lack of overleaping enthusiasm for the column. With the public, the successful columnist bears the same relation to the rest of the newspaper force that a predatory home-run hero bears to the rest of a winning baseball team. He is more or less isolated—usually more—because his personality is constantly in the foreground, while personality in the reportorial staff and to a large extent in the editorial staff is taboo.

Another thing to remember is that there are good columns and bad columns, inspiring columns and disappointing columns. A great majority of them are mediocre and below par, of course. It is a safe guess that managing editors who have been privileged to be the official superiors of the B. L. T.'s, the F. P. A.'s, the Don Marquises, the Heywood Brouns, the Christopher Morleys, and the Jay Houses, have a much higher regard for columns than those who have sadly and despairingly looked upon a steady succession of trials and failures. The

column business is severely handicapped by the fact that there have been very few persistently brilliant columnists.

The humorous column has won the recognition and the cordial tolerance of the managing editor. If he could get hold of the right column conductor, the sky would be the limit of his support and enthusiasm; but until he is that fortunate, the column is on trial for its life.

Perhaps we had better remember that the average managing editor thinks:

That the column exists primarily to amuse the editorial page reader;

That the column is not essential to the success of a newspaper;

That column material is less dignified than other material in the paper;

That some columns are widely read and have great influence;

That a good column is a good thing for circulation;

That a columnist must be above the average newspaper writer in literary background, mental alertness, and writing skill.

IV

The Columnist on Columning

HAT does the columnist think of himself? Has he a job or a position, a purpose or a mission? Is he merely entertaining a reader bored with the dullness of the day's news and the grayer dullness of the editorial comment on the day's news? Or is he a care-free knight in bristling armor with an inexhaustible supply of stinging shafts to hurl at the uncountable shams and hypocrisies of the world? Is he an entertainer or a reformer? Does everything matter or does anything matter? Does he consider himself a clown with a slap-stick, a cynic with a busy ban, a philosopher with a smile? Or does he merely consider himself a newspaper hireling with a family to feed?

Every one of these questions could be answered "yes" or "no" or "yes and no." The column conductor seems to be a very introspective person. He likes to write about himself and his job, and he is frequently writing about himself, either with or without provocation. Perhaps he has to write about himself. He is his own beat. He is paid

to tell the world what *he* thinks of it. In one way or another, he is always telling the world, or a good portion of the world, where and when and how to behave itself.

He may do this with a smile or a frown, with a diatribe or a sermonette, with a "wheeze" or a light essay. He may do it in so many ways and so many moods that he doesn't know how he does it, and more often than not he doesn't believe that he does it. He has to do so much of it that he doesn't succeed a great part of the time.

And the columnist has a most unreasonable audience to please. His public expects him to be entertaining, amusing, profound, keen, and different in every paragraph. What he does well, he must keep on doing. At the same time he must constantly be adding new "stunts"—he must never allow himself to grow dull. He must repeat constantly, without seeming to repeat. He must strike here, there, and everywhere; and crack everybody except each one of his thousands of individual followers.

Is it any wonder that the columnist does not tell convincingly all the secrets of his trade, and the big secret of his art? Is it any wonder that his work and his explanations of his work are full of interesting and sometimes astounding inconsistencies? Why should he, who has to analyze everything else in the world, be required to explain himself and his work?

However, the steady reader of a column gradu-

ally comes to feel that he knows the columnist, knows what kind of man he is around his home, knows what he likes to do for amusement, what he reads, what he believes about this and that, what he thinks of women, what he thinks of young folks and old folks, what he eats and what he refuses to eat. The reader comes to know this whether or not the columnist ever says anything outright about it. But more often than seldom the columnist writes of his whims and hobbies, discussing them upon very slight provocation.

It is necessary for the column conductor to create a well-defined personality for himself before people will follow him regularly. Quite often he poses as being at least wicked enough to be interesting. Sometimes he assumes the rôle of woman-hater or of generally disconcerting and uncomfortable cynic. The best of columnists do not do this too much, but all of them do it to some degree. There is a bit of clownishness in the business, and the tendency to play the devil is strong. With this tendency to play-act, column writers often lose sight of their real selves and either do not know just what they are trying to do or else misrepresent it—quite like the modest scholars and gentlemen that they are.

All this has been given in unfair anticipatory rebuttal of the introspective symposium which follows. The American public is probably more curious about the private life, the intentions, and the ambitions of what it regards as its "humorous" writers than it is about the domestic affairs of movie stars, even.

Columnists are always suspected of having a purpose—diabolical more often than not—no matter how earnestly they may deny it both by word and by performance.

Consequently it has been deemed at least a small part of wisdom to collect here the frank opinions of a few prominent columnists on the subject of "What I am Trying to Do, if Anything." Columnists are quite able to speak for themselves, and it would be grossly unfair and unwise not to allow them a chance. The statements given here are taken from letters to the self-appointed chairman of this symposium. Of course it has been impossible to print something from every letter or all of each of them; and perhaps the chairman has gone a bit out of the way in order to include divergent types of opinions. But he has made a serious effort to be fair both to the truth about column writing in general and to the honest, frank, and freely given opinions of the individual columnists.

Jay House, writer of the "On Second Thought" column in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger,* used parts of two days' columns in recovering from the request for his opinion of his own job. Here is his interesting reaction, certainly distinctive and individual, and certainly worth studying:

We don't know a newspaper column—at any rate, not one of the first rank—which is either intentionally or ostensibly humorous. A newspaper column

is a projection of the old ego. It is the profession of telling it to them at so much per week. What the average man does for his business associates, in his own home and at the corner drug store free of charge, is what the columnist gets paid for doing in his newspaper. Very much of the effectiveness of the performance depends upon imperturbable good humor, grace in the weaving of words, and the technique of projection. There is only one inviolable rule in newspaper-columning and that is, "Be yourself." When all is said and done, that is what a columnist draws a salary for.

. . . . . .

What we think about newspaper-columning is that it is a good job. On the whole, it is a better job than umpiring in the big leagues, to which it is in a way analogous. The hours of toil are about the same—from 3 to 5 o'clock. The necessity of a daily appearance is imperative. The columnist has one advantage over the umpire: He can do his work at any time. He can do it the night before or he can, in a fierce burst of tireless energy, write two or three columns in one day and loaf until sequential issues of his newspaper have exhausted them. We say he can, but that is assumption. Due, perhaps, to the fact that our burst of tireless energy was long ago exhausted, we have never been able to do it. Anyhow, an umpire has got to be on the job from 3 to 5 o'clock. A columnist's style is somewhat less cramped. Both the columnist and the umpire are abused by crowds which profess to thirst for their life's blood but neither is in any

danger. If they were the umpire would have a little something on the columnist, for he is accorded police protection. But, taking them by and large, no two jobs in the world more nearly resemble each other.

Richard Atwater (RIQ) in the Chicago *Evening Post* is a reformed college professor—but not entirely reformed, if we may judge by his first paragraph. Here is what he has to say about columning:

Back in the cloistered days when we, too, were a teacher of English in a state college, it would have been a simple matter to dash off a few pages on the Mission of the column, with footnotes in Greek and Latin, showing how the modern columnist is a happy blend of Q. Horatius Flaccus; the author of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs; Addison, Steele, Aristophanes, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Anacreon, Emerson, Benjamin Franklin, Juvenal, and Samuel Pepys.

After attempting to put this excellent hypothesis into practice for six days a week and fifty weeks a year for a few years, we are not so sure. Just now we are thinking of trying our friend the city editor's theory of column writing. He thinks columns should be readable. Perhaps even this notion will prove to be too idealistic.

The longer we consider the question, the more baffled we feel. What is the purpose of the column, little diary? Sometimes we think it is a sort

of club, maintained by its steward as a place where congenial spirits may drop in and talk or listen whenever they feel like opening the paper to this page. Such contributions to the general diversion may be amusing or serious, lyrical or thoughtful, genial or satiric; it is the steward's duty to see that the effect is, in the main, interesting.

As the toastmaster to this mental banquet he is expected to maintain a certain amount of order and balance, to see that no speaker bores the audience too much, to guard against dragging of dead cats into the club; and on occasion to entertain the table with a few good-humored remarks of his own.

For with the exception of a few happy gentlemen who are privileged to write their entire column in person, modern columnists have to be editors as well as entertainers. There is no newspaper reader who does not think a gazette in which his name or initials occasionally appear is the paper he likes to buy. After reading his poem or jest in the sacred type, he casually looks over the rest of the column, and expects this to be equally noble. Thus the column editor has the quaint task of printing everything sent in, and making sure that nothing printed will displease anybody else.

This requires some degree of diplomacy, as the daily mail will present from ten to a hundred times as much stuff as can be put in a given column even of rubber type. There are other requirements that keep the columnist from doing the job in his sleep. What he prints must be not only readable, interesting and clean. It must be fair, honest, harmless, cultured, diverting, sophisticated, humorous, topical,

amiable, varied, devoid of jealousy or pretense. Perhaps we had better say should be rather than must be, for after all, it's pretty hard to get all of those nice adjectives into one issue.

After writing this much of an attempt to answer the conundrum, we think we had better give it up, after all. We don't see how we can do the subject justice without taking it seriously; and a columnist who takes his job seriously ought to take a long vacation in the wildwoods. Perhaps that little thought is what you are looking for, the Mission of the column is to have none. Or is this an admission rather than a mission?

Neal O'Hara, writer of "Telling The World," the New York *Evening World,* is frank enough—everybody will agree—in his first paragraph. And he carries convincingness from beginning to end. There is only one exception to be noted: he confesses that he has no mission and then proves that he does have one.

I shall frankly say that I do my column daily for the primary and venal purpose of making money. In these days humorous writing is very highly paid—that is, in comparison with other kinds of newspaper writing. In the last five or six years the demand has steadily increased for newspaper humor, and with it the rates paid.

Doing a daily column is really quite a laborious thing, however, especially when you do all the writing yourself and have no contributors. I rather

think the other kind of column must be easy, but I have never tried it.

Truly I must tell you I have no mission or purpose in the back of my mind. I only try to pick some live news topic that is on the tip of the public tongue and give it a humorous twist, by satire, burlesque or kidding, while the subject is still hot.

With me, that is everything. I mean hopping on a topic while it is live. It is so much easier to make readers smile about something on which they are informed by today's headlines than about some abstract subject.

I like to take a shot at the shams and hypocrisies that hatch daily in our lives. I honestly enjoy that. Fundamentally, I suppose, the columnist today is doing the work of Addison and Swift in the *Spectator,* although I am the last man to try to link his and his confreres' names with that immortal pair.

As I have said, it's a lot of fun, but it's hard work, and it's also good money. And there you are.

S. E. Kiser's views are to be seriously considered because of the background of twenty-five years that has produced them and because of the succinct manner in which they are stated:

When you ask me what I think of my job as a "colyumist" I am compelled to admit that I like it. I have been working at it for about twenty-five years, and I feel sure that if I didn't like it I should have been compelled long ago to try something else.

Perhaps I am engaging in the academic discus-

sion you wish to avoid when I say that my idea of a "colyum" is a place in which opportunity is provided for pointing out the absurdities of people who become too greatly impressed by their own importance. It is an outlet for personal opinion; a convenient place in which to be as funny as possible, and in which to be serious when seriousness seems to be necessary; but its chiefest purpose is to lure newspaper readers into the mysterious depths of the editorial page.

The "colyumist," as I appraise him, must have a sense of humor, and be able to express it; he must do some thinking, even if it hurts or requires effort; he must have a desire to assist in making the world fit to live in; he must know where reason ends and prejudice begins; he must be a poet, a wit, a philosopher, a critic; he must be visionary and practical, and he becomes a bore as soon as he makes a habit of taking himself seriously.

Will M. Maupin, of the Omaha *Bee,* is enthusiastic. He admits, first thing, that his job is a "darned good one," and then tells why he thinks so. He also believes in columns in general.

"What do I think of my own job?"

I think it is a darned good one. Remember, however, I am speaking of the job, and for reasons too numerous to mention in detail. But among other causes for liking it are—it affords more time for leisure than if I were covering a run or were charged with the duty of preparing an entire editorial department. It "puts no strings on me." I

am practically a free lance. In newspaper parlance, the newspaper "colyum" is a "self-feeder." If it is a worth while "colyum" its conductor's friends are constantly suggesting, and often contributing, ideas that lighten the labor of filling it. And lastly, but by no means least—and please do not let my editor-in-chief learn of this—I like my job because my department, so friends tell me, relieves the dreariness of the editorial page. Just how much it relieves is not for me to say. And now one final reason: I like my job because it widens my circles of friends, permits me now and then to contribute a little cheer in a world that is too often drab and a bit wearisome, and the salary check each week is bigger than I ever before enjoyed in some forty years of newspaper work.

As for the "colyums" in general—perhaps you have noted the fact that the greatest newspapers in the country have them. They may be one of the causes contributing to their greatness. Quien Sabe!

There is a note of doubt in the answer of G. M. C. (George Morrison Carleton) of the Cleveland *News*. It is a note, however, not often found in "The Mad Hatter." Perhaps he is only reflecting what every columnist feels several times a year, if not oftener.

Primarily the column should afford amusement to the greatest possible number of the newspaper's readers. After that, I believe that it can often do good in an editorial way by the use of ridicule which

would be out of place in the more austere editorial columns themselves.

And, among other things, it should support its conductor and permit him to dwell in luxury. This, I consider, MOST important!

My own job I view with a mixture of sentiments. Sometimes I am very fond of it and other times I wonder whether it is worth while going on after all. These sentiments are greatly affected by the quality and volume of my correspondence. You would be surprised, I dare say, if you knew how many people:

(a) despise attempts at humor (mine),
(b) prefer *Whiz Bang,*
and (c) take the trouble to write me about it.

In general, I would say that "columning" is splendid practice in writing. It very seldom amounts to more than that.

Sam Hill (H. N. Hildreth), of the Cincinnati *Enquirer,* is depressed because the girls pay not the slightest attention to his well-meant advice, but hopes he has induced a laugh now and then and consequently has not lived in vain.

The purpose, I suppose, of columns is to amuse, but back of that is a desire to turn the world from its foolishness by holding its sins and shortcomings up to ridicule.

It is a mighty discouraging job, however.

In the last four years I myself have written something like 18,000 paragraphs on short skirts, bobbed hair and rouge and have been as successful in dis-

couraging them as Lucy Page Gaston was in discouraging the smoking of the naughty little coffin nails.

The girls read what I wrote, I know from the mean things they said about me afterwards, but I haven't heard of a single lass who added one-sixteenth of an inch to her skirt, nor of one who resisted the temptation to enter the bobber shop, nor of one who threw her pot of rouge out of the window as a result of my years of hard work.

Be that as it may, the fashions will change some day and our efforts to get the girls to hide their knees, use exercise instead of paint to get color in their cheeks, and cut out the jazz life may be more successful.

On the other hand, no matter how much of a failure a column writer may have been as a reformer, if he has been able to give his readers a good laugh now and then he has not lived in vain. There is too much in this old world to make people cry and too little in it to make them laugh. There isn't anything that can scare off trouble as quickly or effectively as a good laugh and there ought to be a course in laughter in every school. Schools have a way of developing a student's mind and body, but fail miserably when it comes to developing his sense of humor. Not nearly so much of a humorist's efforts would go to waste if folks had a well-trained sense of humor and could see the points of his jokes without the aid of a diagram.

It is no joke to be funny every day. Atlas holding the world on his shoulders had a job that was a snap compared with the job the column writer

has when he tackles his day's work while suffering from a splitting headache, flu, dyspepsia or just general grouch. The folks who read the funny things he has written never give a thought to the conditions under which they were written. And ye jokesmith doesn't expect them to. It's his job to make them laugh, not make them sympathize with him. When folks roar at a fat man chasing his straw lid down the street they never waste any tears on his own feelings about the show. And they're just as inconsiderate when it comes to humorists.

However, column writing is a worth-while job, and no man who takes it up need be ashamed of his calling—providing he is making the people laugh—and getting well paid for it.

It is easier to be a joke than it is to write one.

Don Marquis has a good deal to say, but, true to his genius, he doesn't take long to say it. Like Jay House, he doubts that humorous columns are, or ought to be, particularly humorous.

I should like to be able to give you a comprehensive article on what I think of columnists, but the only manner in which I have been able to do one for twelve years is to be not thinking about it. I think that while this may not be the secret of writing a column it may be the secret of continuing to write one. My only receipt whatever is never to think what the next one is going to be about. This gives me a chance to vary them and I have never at any time considered it strictly a humorous column.

I do not think any man can be funny every day. If he is funny once a week he is doing very well.

Richard Henry Little, who is successfully performing the extra-hard task of following Bert Leston Taylor in the "Line o' Type or Two" of the Chicago *Tribune,* believes in making a column human. Without bow, apology, or dodge he starts by saying:

The mission of the column is to make people happier. It must be human. We must present not only the funnier but some of the sweeter and even the sadder things of life. It must permit its contributors the widest expression possible, it must help their development. Look at the amateur writers of the Line, Snowshoe, Donfarron, Marjorie F. W., Jayhawker, Lun Dee, David Sortor, Phantom Lover, Le Mousquetaire, Solicitor, Madelon and so many others. Without the Line most of these would have died with all their music in 'em.

Ted Robinson, of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* probably the most often quoted of America's column versifiers, sums up his views as follows:

As to my opinion on the "mission" of my column, I have none. The missionary spirit bobs up on special occasions, but in twenty years of column writing I have been conscious of nothing but a desire to entertain. The verses are written according to the

mood of the moment, and they are as likely to be serious as flippant, and may be sentimental on the days when they are not satirical. I do like to take advantage of my position to do a little teaching and a little preaching and to puncture all the pompous bunk that seems to need puncturing. But when I begin to take myself seriously, I fear for the holy cause of Humor.

It would be an unforgivable breech of etiquette, humor, and good sense not to give a woman the last word. In "The Woman of It" (New York *Evening World*) Margaret Mooers Marshall has the daily task of telling the world all about the woman's angle on everything. Here is her conception of her job:

We hastily disclaim any knowledge of "columning in general"—
Columning in particular keeps us busy enough!
And, if anybody's column has a "mission,"
We insist that THE WOMAN OF IT has NOT!
"As soon as a man has a mission he's lost," said the cynic—
But, as soon as a woman has one, she's a BORE!
The most important purpose in life of THE WOMAN OF IT
Is to be readable—and READ!
One difference between us and Shakespeare—
(Consider the obvious comeback made and accepted)—
Is that we write not for all time but for an age

Twenty-four hours long—until another day.
We must be read, if at all, over the luncheon table, in the subway or the commuter's train, in the living room after dinner;
We must be readable
For tired folk and hurried folk and folk who wouldn't read at all unless they were really interested.
And so the column has to touch on interesting topics,
It has to be written as well as possible—
With clearness, intelligence, humor, sympathy, honesty—
Or the reader's eye will make a swift and easy transition
To Maurice Ketten, in the middle of the next page,
Who ALWAYS displays all these qualities!
The column's name indicates another of its purposes—
THE WOMAN OF IT means just that!
We try to show, in what we write,
That reaction, or point of view, which modern editors call "the woman angle,"
On such matters as men and marriage and love and the younger generation and peace and work and books and beauty and the ironies of life that decorate the day's news.
Women with brains think and talk about these matters,
And there really are a number of persons, nowadays,
Who admit that women HAVE brains!
Just as, several centuries ago, the Fathers of the Church admitted—albeit reluctantly—

That women have souls.
Another thing we like to do with the column
Is to show in it how funny men are!
Really, that's no more than fair!
We do not carry our feminism like a chip on the shoulder—
We are not Anti-Man, just because we are Pro-Woman—
But, ever since men began to write and make pictures,
They have giggled and gurgled and chuckled and roared
Over the folly of womankind—
Isn't it time that ONE woman's column be devoted
To the highly humorous aspects of MANKIND?
We think so!
(Besides, we always give the other side a chance,
Men who are good sports enough to read us, and to come to their own defense,
Get a fair share of their contributions printed!)
We try to print enough contributions by everybody on everything
So that the column will not sound like an egotist's monotonous monologue.
Finally, we have adopted the expressed conviction
Of columnists "older than we—Of many far wiser than we"—
That the ideas, impressions and experiences which seem to us interesting, beautiful or funny
Will seem so to others.
That's why we write about our beach bungalow, our

ready-made family, our ideas on love and marriage—
(Ideas which express our personal happiness and our impersonal satire);
We write about books we like,
About pieces of hypocrisy (especially Prohibition and other "reform" varieties) which we dislike,
About the many human comedies a newspaper reader finds,
And the certain few subjects on which it seems worth while to be serious;
We write poems and we print verses which we find printable, when they are sent to us,
Because, as with many women, poetry is our favorite form of literary expression.
We don't believe in desk mottoes,
But, if we had one, we know what it would be!
We would say, with J. K. Huysmans:
"I write what I see, what I feel, what I experience,
"And I write it as well as I can—that is all."

We promised to give the columnists the last word, because we took the first.

V

Types of Columns

HE best—perhaps the only—way to become well acquainted with what columns contain is to read and study day in and day out, for weeks upon end, several varieties of columns. If one continues such a study for only ten days or two weeks, one will find oneself rapidly developing a tendency to expect certain things in certain columns. Those things may be particular tricks and devices, or they may be particular varieties of subject matter. In two weeks one can usually get acquainted with a columnist's style, his pet "peeves," his prejudices and approvals, and—of course—his frailties. One grows also to know the column as he might know a close friend.

The average column follower knows one column. Sometimes a column addict may know two or three, but always he has one favorite. He does not know even his favorite column analytically, however. If he likes a column, he judges it by the two or three paragraphs in each issue that suit him best. If he dislikes it, he judges it by its dullest features.

The student of columns must, however, know many columns, and he must know them analytically,

without developing blinding prejudices for particular types of humor and styles of writing. Time, as well as study, is required to effect this judicial attitude of mind; but not as much time as one might suspect.

Furthermore, the student of columns must be prepared to sacrifice the pleasure that comes with normal column reading. There is perhaps no more satisfying fun for the average man than the reading of his favorite column. There is certainly no greater drudgery than the reading of twenty-five or fifty columns at a sitting, or even in a day of several sittings. There is no question that columns pall, and pall rapidly. Even when the most gifted of columnists make their best stuff into books, the books please for only a few minutes. Ten or twelve pages at a reading is enough—and some to spare.

Consequently it is necessary that the student be willing to sacrifice at the beginning much of that which makes him like columns. He must prepare for a period of boredom, for the road to learning in the matter of the lightsome, unserious column is all the more laborious because the column avoids drudgery and boredom as it would the plague. Select a dozen columns, read them daily for two weeks, and be both disillusioned and enlightened. It does not make much difference what columns you read, or who writes them; although it is wise to select columns of obviously different types and intents.

It is also necessary that a further pedagogical

word of caution be given. The student should read the column as a whole, and should not give the bulk of his attention to the two or three particular paragraphs or epigrams or jingles that happen to please him most. It is not a bad idea to tabulate and classify the units of the column, if it has units. This sort of semi-scientific survey has one big advantage: at the end of two or three weeks one can speak with some assurance on the subject of what A. B. C. or X. Y. Z. puts in his columns. Without it, one cannot.

Such investigation is precisely the kind of work that the real student—if there are any real students—is glad to do for himself. Much of the apparent difficulty of classifying the material of columns passes away the minute one sets himself seriously to work at it. Names for the types may not come easily, but they are not long in arriving.

Here is a column that contains one poem, one jingle, four short pointed paragraphs, one long paragraph with the point pretty well dulled, one quoted blunder, two short letters from contributors, two bits of light repartee to published statements of prominent men, an interesting descriptive paragraph by a contributor, and a satirical headline over a quotation from a prominent author. Another column contains two short jingles, a hundred words or so of hillbilly dialogue, an attempt at an epigram, and eleven short paragraphs (forty to sixty words), seven of which comment lightly upon current news notes and four of which comment more lightly upon

such matters of general and enduring interest as the high price of raspberries, the use of corn on the cob and celery in the same gastronomic season, the eternal payment on the flivver, and the efforts of a Saturday-night quartet.

Still another column has a light essay of 500 words on the cruelty of animals to man, a pretended interview with the late W. J. Bryan on the subject of university textbooks, and two fairly long paragraphs reviewing Werner's *Brigham Young.*

Even such hurried surveys as these will, if continued for a short time, soon acquaint the student with the product of columnists' labors. It is easily possible to become much better acquainted with a column conductor's work than he himself is acquainted with it, for many columnists are quite mistaken about their own intentions and accomplishments.

The following classification of columns is made for convenience and for occasional and temporary use. The student will rarely find a column that fits nicely into any of the classes listed. There will always be some addition, reservation, or violation. But if this outline helps the reader to get started on a better classification—of his own—it will accomplish its purpose.

The Standard Column. Right away we are in trouble. Columnists and column fans are already howling us down. "There is no such thing," they cry. And of course they are right. But if there were a standard column, it would be composed al-

most entirely of short paragraphs of pithy editorial comment on the news of the day. The general tone would be satirical and maybe somewhat cynical. There might be a piercing epigram or two if the columnist's digestion happened to be particularly good or particularly bad, and there might be some jingle or some verse if his abilities extended beyond the boundaries of prose. In the main, however, the column would confine itself to pithy editorializing on matters of current interest. This type of column is designated "standard" because it is the most common type, and—one person's guess being as good as another's—it is the original type, which aimed to liven up the editorial page a bit by segregating the lighter editorials and adding to them. This is the type of column writing that comes most easily, the type that most writers are fitted for. The special types demand peculiarly gifted writers.

This standard column deals principally with the news of the day. Usually the bias of the columnist is clearly manifest in the news bias of the column. If he is interested in sports, the column may take on the aspect of a sport page column. If the columnist is a close follower of current literature, criticisms of books and authors and jibes at the absurdities of literary people and literary manners abound in his work. If he is interested in politics and business and affairs of the world, he comments often upon such things. As a rule, the bias of a standard column is in the direction of sports or public affairs.

The Hodge-Podge Column. A second common kind of column is that which obviously seeks diversity in subject matter, form, and vehicle. It avoids monotony, regardless of expense. It uses a hodge-podge of type and mixes free and bound verse with long and short paragraphs of prose. Wheezes of unlimited variety abound in it, and any verse or prose form that is unusual is welcomed. Boldface, italics, and capitals relieve the monotony of lower-case roman.

In subject matter columns of this kind often show a too labored attempt to seek out the unusual. On the other hand, there is frequently too much patent and threadbare subject matter in the unusual forms and vehicles. Such columns often pay altogether too high a price for the doubtful chance of being considered original or different; they represent the opposite of the sedate, standard form. Many of the writers of this type of column are unconscious (and poor enough) imitators of the "Line o' Type or Two" as it was made famous by Bert Leston Taylor. They have copied his tricks, but failed to reach his standard of humor, as ordinary columnists might be expected to fail.

The Jingle Column. A third kind of column runs largely to jingle and verse. The conductor is usually a clever versifier, and he naturally attracts good writers of jingle and prose as his contribs. He realizes that thought run in rippling verse makes a better bid for both attention and retention.

Franklin P. Adams is undoubtedly the smartest

of such column conductors in America, though Ted Robinson is perhaps more widely quoted. Eugene Field, the pioneer columnist of America, did much to create the present taste for popular, newspaper poetry, and yet remains somewhat in a class by himself.

The comic verse of American newspaper columns, when the good has been sifted from the bad, is going to fill not an insignificant place in the history of American literature. It has so far proved to be the most enduring work of columnist or contrib. The better part of it will be known by later generations as the *vers de société* of our age.

The Essay Column. The philosophical, light-essay type of column splits up into several forms. There is the very personal, subjective form that may discuss one topic or a dozen before the bottom of the page is reached. If the conductor's mood or "grouch" is sufficiently hardy, one bone of contention may last until the day's work is done. Much that is personal prejudice is found in such writing, the ego being constantly on duty. One of the best columns of this type written in America today is "On Second Thought," by Jay House.

Another excellent one of the same class is the "It Seems to Me" column of Heywood Broun. The light-essay style is preserved throughout in both. Heywood Broun's columns are less intimate and less domestic than those of Jay House. They are more likely to be upon expected subjects—sub-

jects that are catching the world's attention at the time.

Christopher Morley's columns are of somewhat the same nature, though they contain more that is straight literary criticism, material that the ordinary reader is quite likely to dub "highbrow stuff."

The Contrib. Column. Still another kind of column is that which bids for contributions. Such a column is hard to characterize as to make-up, for its quality is determined by the contributions sent in, which are predetermined by those printed; and those printed are determined by the prejudices and approvals of the column conductor. The contributed column, of course, has less individuality than the column written entirely or almost entirely by the columnist. The conductor can—and does—determine the general tone; but he cannot control the particulars and the details. As a rule the contributors somewhat slavishly imitate the conductor or cater to his tastes, although their work is frequently quite original and free. An extreme in the case of the contributed column is the "Fun Shop," a syndicated feature which is nothing more nor less than an amateur symposium of wit and humor.

The foregoing classification makes no pretense of being an exhaustive or a correct one. Only by the greatest of charitable thinking, indeed, can it be considered a classification at all. One will do well to use it only as a well-meaning but unreliable guide.

There is still another type of column found in the larger papers in the West and Middle West. It is the column quoting and sometimes commenting upon stories and editorials in the press of the surrounding district, generally a state. By such a feature the metropolitan paper keeps in touch with the small-city and the rural press. Very often such a column includes good human-interest notes, which reflect the life of the smaller communities. By this means the metropolitan papers increase their rural circulation and at the same time build up good will among the newspaper fraternity in their territory. Few newspaper men in the smaller cities and the villages dislike being quoted.

Of course a diligent searcher will discover other types of columns, for there is hardly a district in the United States that does not have one or more column geniuses with dispositions original enough to develop a product that is different and individual. There are many ill-advised attempts to achieve distinctiveness. True individuality in a column comes only after years of painstaking and often painful development, and it evolves in its own manner and time. One must remember also that a columnist's standard should be determined by his average daily production and not by some particularly brilliant flight or dismal failure to take the air. Therefore it behooves one not to base one's decision on too few cases or on single examples of brilliance or dullness.

The success of a column cannot be measured by the quality or quantity of the contributions, although

one cannot deny that a goodly number of interested and interesting contributors in the newspaper's territory is irrefutable evidence of a fine sentiment toward the column. Some column writers have or acquire the knack of arousing their readers to the point of actually contributing. Others, just as good, do not have such a knack and cannot acquire it. Those that have it often exploit it too greedily. A close study of several hundred columns will reveal that not a large number of them depend greatly upon contributions. It will also reveal that the contributor's work is usually of a quality inferior to that of the columnist.

Most columnists do not provoke a response that registers appreciably in their columns. Perhaps it is true that most of them do not attempt it. Many of them seem to prefer to assume the entire burden and run things entirely to suit themselves. Consequently, although a small proportion of interesting contributed material is undoubtedly one of the proofs of the success, it is not a requisite. Bert Leston Taylor, whose genius easily made him the dean of column humorists, seemingly could not keep from attracting most excellent contributions. His personality drew them in like magic. His success was so marked as to lead many to decide that all good columnists should get bushels of contributions a day. But geniuses like Bert Leston Taylor come once in several decades, and his rare power should not be listed as a requisite for successful columnists. When one reads the hundreds of dull, strained con-

tributions that clutter up many columns in America and realizes what a portion of them should stay in the fourth-rate vaudeville circuits from which they came, one is inclined to lower considerably the rating he might otherwise give contributions as a feature of a good column.

Nor should one judge a column altogether by the appeal it makes to him personally. Naturally this is what the average reader does. To him a column is good when it steps on everybody else's toes but his own, and bad when his own feet suffer. It is too highbrow when he can't understand it and too lowbrow when he can. A fair judgment of a column must always take into account the whole body of readers.

If a column appears on a sport page or on any page in a paper that caters to the sensational and instinctive in man, one may be sure that it is not a good column if the humor is subtle and refined. Such readers like their humor not too well done. Frequently they like it raw.

On the other hand, a column appearing on the editorial page of a conservative paper, that prides itself on the dignity of its editorials and feature articles, should be subtle and somewhat dignified in tone. A column is good when it is nicely adjusted to its readers. It should highbrow them somewhat, but not too much. One should be careful, therefore, about passing judgment too hurriedly on the basis of his own prejudices. Sport-page humorous columns that we might quickly condemn for being

entirely too local and too crude may be doing almost to perfection the thing that the sports editor wants done.

Further proof that one's own prejudices are fallible is found in the oft-heard remark: "I can't for the life of me see how that fellow gets away with the kind of stuff he pulls in that column." Such a remark is made about successful columnists quite as often as it is about the fairly successful and the failures. To determine the proper tone of a column one must take into consideration the general tone of the paper and the particular function of the column in the paper. Having done that, one is free to allow some weight to his own tastes.

After all, we must remember that the only real excuse for a humorous column in a newspaper is a good columnist and that the good columnist is sure eventually to develop his own type of column different in several particulars from all other columns. Mediocre writers, who can imitate but not create, will naturally follow the lead of the good writers they can best imitate. As a consequence, a distinct type of column can safely be regarded as the work of some highly successful columnist who has been big enough to build something new and lasting.

The student, then, studying columns for the purpose of analysis and classification, must be prepared to reorganize his conclusions frequently. Above all else he must be prepared to labor and search for a rather long time without picking up the

numerous premature conclusions that are sure to offer themselves at bargain prices. If after his long search, he decides that it is just as well not to have a classification, well and good. Classifications and conclusions are of little use, anyhow, to the person who knows enough to make them.

VI

Following the News

HE chief business of the column, if it has a chief business, is that of following the news with comment, entertaining always and not too serious ever. The columnist looks upon himself as a sort of court fool, merry, irreverent, and keen. His court is the people who read the paper. His foil is the world taking itself seriously; his business to keep that world from doing so.

How much the columnist depends upon the goings-on in the workaday world can be determined without much trouble by checking through twenty or twenty-five humorous columns to determine the proportion of individual paragraphs based upon recent events. Examples by the score could easily be given, but they would not convince half so well as a little patient, private investigation by the reader. Even a small number of columns will show that the average columnist would have little to say were it not for news.

The "bigger" the news, the more paragraphs, jingles, and wheezes are written about it. The biggest news feature of the first half of 1925 was undoubtedly the "evolution" trial at Dayton, Ten-

nessee. During the period that public interest was centered in the trial (two or three weeks) many of the country's leading columnists devoted practically all their efforts to entertaining their readers with satirical comment upon the great battle. Those columnists who said nothing about it have so far escaped detection. Epigrams, paragraphs, light essays, jingles, playlets, burlesqued court records, poured forth in the humorous columns. Not a single important situation or development in the trial escaped the columnists, who were on the job just as vigilantly as were the reporters.

Most of the efforts of the better writers were pleasing and some were quite entrancing—at the time. But read them two, six, twelve months later and their charm is gone. They are quite lifeless, even those that were positively ripping at the time of the trial. Satirical comment on news dies a few days after the news does, for satire depends upon—simply must have—a background of live information in the minds of its readers.

During a political campaign, speeches, pronouncements, and "situations" furnish opportunities galore to the columnist. The politician is fine prey for paragraphers, for he has to use quantities of buncombe to get along. The columnist is prone to shoot at leaders, particularly at self-elected leaders, and at other attention-attracting, representative types. Essentially he is a philosopher, and he likes types to operate upon.

The more serious the leader, and the more important the field in which he attempts to lead, the more likely are paragraphers to attack him. Particularly do reformers and politicians with messianic delusions come in for a great share of the drubbing. Let anybody attempt to convert the world to a new religion, a new theory of government or industrial economy, a new philosophy of living, or a new code of morals, and the columnists will fly at him like hungry mosquitos. Never was a man more be-paragraphed than was Woodrow Wilson when he set off to Europe to take the final, glorious step in making the world safe for democracy. Columnists are ultra-conservative when it comes to making the world over in too short a time. They are not exactly anti-reform, but they are usually anti-reformer.

But it is not only big news that arouses the ambition of the paragrapher. The little things also stir him—if there is sufficient human interest in them. Examine these three news situations.

A woman in Kansas who is 93 years old asks for divorce from her 70-year-old husband, alleging mistreatment and abuse. She prays that the divorce be given her so that she can live in "peace and quiet" and so that she will not have to "experience the torment of married life" with the defendant. There are dozens of paragraphs and a good light essay or two in this little front-page story of less than 70 words. A writer who could not extract an

entire column out of such a situation is not much of a columnist.

An American film star, angered at a French cartoonist because of caricatures he drew of her and her husband, attacks him with a champagne bottle in a Paris café. The cartoonist, convinced for the moment that discretion is the greater part of valor, dives under a table and thereby causes much precious liquor to be spilled upon more precious evening gowns of prominent society women.

On the same front page prominent Episcopal bishops are at war over the word "obey" in the Episcopal marriage ceremony.

These three more or less insignificant stories ought to keep the wolf away from a columnist's door for a day at least. A thing doesn't have to be big and important to be worth a paragraph or two. However, it must have a good deal of human interest.

The helper that the columnist must take with him to his study of the day's news is an active sense of humor. To secure the best results his mind must be tearing at its moorings and his imagination must be shooting fire. He is not confined to the news story upon which he bases his paragraph, nor even to things directly related to that news story. The divorce case mentioned in a foregoing paragraph might reasonably lead to a dissertation upon the problems of domesticity, the rights of women, or the necessity of regulating the conduct of elderly folk. The film star's attack upon the artist opens

the way to discussion of artistic temperament, the antics of movie stars, the blessings of prohibition, or the necessity of liquor-proofing the gowns of society women. The war over the word "obey" opens up the whole field of—well, everything.

There is seldom an issue of a large city daily that does not have in it material enough to provoke a column of paragraphs. Just to show what may be done in the way of getting column material from the day's grist of news, a dozen or so paragraphs are here offered. Nothing is claimed for them except that they were provoked by one issue of a daily paper. They are all based upon news stories in the August 28, 1925, issue of the Kansas City *Times* (the morning Kansas City *Star*). The material is not offered as an example of what a column should be. Seldom should a column be based upon so restricted a source as a single issue of a paper. And seldom should the columnist run an entire news-slant column, although it may well be news-slant in the main; for the columnist, no matter what his particular flair, should never forget that his material is to appear in a newspaper and that the newspaper reader is primarily interested in the news.

The reader will note that representative types of news material have been used. Paragraphs 1 and 7 have been taken from top-head stories of considerable general concern. Numbers 2 and 6 are from stories with strong human interest, but of little importance. Numbers 3 and 5 are from mere

front-page fillers. Number 4 is from a headline, number 8 from a court record, and number 9 from the legend of a news picture. Number 10 is from a three-line notice, number 11 from an advertisement, and number 12 from a list of the week's epigrams quoted on the editorial page. The classified advertising section, usually good for a wheeze or two, has not been molested.

(1) The annual strike in the hard coal fields has been ordered for September 1. The miners are to lose a million dollars a day. The operators, who seem to be at their wit's end, claim that they do not know what to do. We suggest that they increase the price of coal enough to make up for that million that the miners will lose. This increase, added to the million that they will save in wages, will net them a cool two million a day, which won't be so bad even for coal kings.

(2) In Budapest there lives a man,
Bela Vicsey by name,
Who's eaten naught for seventy days—
Boy, page empty fame.

(3) Japan has the highest birthrate among the so-called civilized nations of the world, 3.88 Japanese being ushered into life every minute. All of which goes to prove that you can't keep a good thing like the Yellow Peril off the front pages, especially in these days of nothing to fill the paper with.

POSSE KILLS TWO BANDITS

(4) Startling headline indeed. No bandit should overlook it, for it goes to show that once in a while some layman gets deputized who shoots without taking aim.

(5) The recently appointed commander of the New York coast guard division declares that "rum row" is deserted now for the first time in years. He expects to make his first trip of inspection within a week and prove it.

(6) Gordon Ralph Kent, age 26—months, held up the baby show at the Central States Fair at Aurora, Illinois for over an hour. He objected to being disrobed and it took the doctors, nurses, and attendants more than sixty precious minutes to examine him. On form and health he was pronounced perfect, but the finicky judges fined him 30 points for "irritability, distractability, and resistance."

Of course there is danger that his "irritability, distractability, and resistance" are infectious and will spread to the other perfect babies that are making the round of agricultural fairs with prize steers and strawberry preserves, but there is little likelihood that such reprehensible objection to examination will spoil the smoothness of the annual bathing beauty contest at Atlantic City. The girls are older, and know better.

(7) There is, of course, no telling what the French debt mission will say when it arrives in Washington, but it is to be hoped that our feelings will be spared anything like "Coolidge, we are here." In the first place, such a remark would be too obviously reminiscent of what somebody said Pershing said; and in the second place, President Coolidge would want to wait two or three days before making a reply and the French diplomats might misinterpret his silence, not being accustomed to it.

(8) Of twenty-five divorce suits filed in Kansas City yesterday the husbands asked for twelve and the wives asked for thirteen. It is a good two-to-one shot that the first divorce suit tomorrow morning will be filed by a man, domesticity being the most fifty-fifty business on earth.

(9) An Indianapolis heiress must postpone her marriage to a German count because her birth certificate is missing. Heiresses who go count-hunting simply cannot be too careful about things like that. If the unfortunate girl had elected to wed some ordinary citizen of Indiana, in which state even a bottle is prima facie evidence of intent to bootleg, he would have accepted her existence as proof positive that she had been born.

WHO'S WORRYIN' ABOUT DEMOCRACY?

(10) The Ridenour-Baker Grocery Company and the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity will hold picnics at Fairyland Park today.

(11) It begins to look as if the honored procession of medicine is going the Wrigley way. The latest and most impressive indication is the introduction on the drug store market of SILPH, a chewing gum which eliminates stomach trouble, both in- and ex-terior. The manufacturers very kindly issue the warning that those who do not want to lose weight should avoid SILPH.

(12) Henry Ford says that to him square dances are beautiful for the same reason that colonial interiors are beautiful. If Henry doesn't restrain his perspicacity, someday he will discover another beautiful similarity between the Charleston and a well known perky little automobile manufactured in Detroit.

There is, of course, no way of predetermining what kind of news stories will work over best into column material. There is no assurance that any of them will develop. The columnist's mind may be "much alive" and his funnybone hypersensitive. If such is the case, well and good—his column will

materialize in a comparatively short time. Or he may be sluggish, and everything may seem sodden and heavy-footed. In such a situation he must struggle. If he gives up readily because he doesn't feel like working, the deadline may come and go before he recovers. Usually, if he stays on the job for twenty or thirty minutes, the break will come, and it will be a break in his favor.

If the column writer knows who his readers are, he can usually find the type of news and feature stories that will catch their attention. If nothing better offers, he can always consult his own interests, for the chances are that they are just about the same as those of the readers who follow his work. Too many column writers seem to confine their reading too closely to the sporting news. Others like to select a promising free horse—like Dean Inge on his recent tour through the United States—and ride him to death. If the particular horse chosen is attracting great quantities of general attention, such a course is in a measure justifiable, and may multiply the number of readers and increase the prestige of the paragrapher. The Prince of Wales was such a mount. Nevertheless, variety stubbornly refuses to surrender its rôle as the spice of life. Newspaper readers demand it even when it does not exist.

But all this should not be taken to mean that a hobby well ridden is not a delightful spectacle. The prestige of many a columnist has risen steadily because of his insistent "going after" somebody or

something even to the limits of boredom. His ability to punish his victim is a thing that fans like to talk about and gloat over. He is liked because he can express the insistent peeves that irk his mute, inglorious readers. Many a column fan depends upon his favorite columnist for the insistent roasting of the president, senator, mayor, baseball manager, or preacher whom he detests beyond the limits of his own meager capacity for satire.

However, it is still the part of wisdom for the columnist to search widely in every section of the papers for his news-slant material. It may be a front-page top-head story that will make him fame, or it may be a six-point court notice or a want ad. Certain it is that the more types of news he touches upon, the more types of readers he will attract to his columns. Good human-interest stories are undoubtedly, everything considered, his best bet, for they have in them the elements that appeal to the great masses of people. A column must succeed, not merely by entertaining the readers who have already been caught, but by gathering recruits for the merry game of column reading.

After all, the columnist is a critic of contemporary life, and it is with current interests that he has to deal, whether his tastes run to such or not. He may "reminisce" now and then, but his reminiscences must always bear upon the current interests and current problems of his readers. Therefore a considerable part of the background upon which and to which he writes must be the rambling river of

daily news. His success is likely to depend almost entirely on the reaction of his ego to contemporary human interests.

Skill in finding and in developing good news situations comes in at the same door that all skill insists upon using—the door of continued practice. Write a dozen news-slant paragraphs a day for a period of a week or ten days to test the truth of the preceding pronouncement. There is no other way to test it. Of course some individuals are equipped with more facile minds than others are. Such fortunate folk find it easier to make a start. But the big and important fact is that a dependable facility of mind can be developed by determination and practice. News-slant paragraphing is an interesting sport for the amateur column writer and a fine corrective for gullibility. Newspaper propagandists will have to be much more careful and much more clever when more newspaper readers indulge in it.

VII

Sure-Fire Stuff

NO one can proceed far in the study of columns without discovering that tastes in humor differ—very noticeably. There is a reading public that wants humor of a subtle, sophisticated variety. This comparatively small group turns for its entertainment to the less serious articles in the *American Mercury* and *Vanity Fair* and to the light essays that abound in the more conservative literary monthlies. This public the newspaper columnist must consider, of course. Then there is the great majority of newspaper readers, who want a liberal sprinkling of sure-fire stuff.

It should be understood at the outset that the writer does not wish to belittle the type of humor that resorts to tricks and the cheaper appeals to insure its "going over." And there is certainly no wish to cast aspersions in the direction of the professional humorists who devote their energies largely to the preparation and live presentation of "old stuff" that is guaranteed to get results, and known never to fail. One may be quite sure that there is

a public demanding any type of humor that continues to run for a long period in any newspaper or magazine, and that that public has, at least in its own opinion, as much right to what it wants as has any other public.

We must remember also that humor does not have a particularly refined ancestry. Dr. Freud and his followers have charged that a surprising amount of it clusters insistently around matters related to sex. And their charge is hard to disprove. Unless a watchful censorship is kept upon jokes, stories, and illustrations in humorous publications —or in conversation,—there is likely to be a reversion to type that results in what we cautiously call a "lowering of tone."

Most of us like good skating over thin ice. All we ask is that the skating be cleverly executed and that the ice retain its smoothness and resiliency. Just how thin we like the ice depends upon the people present, whose social approbation we must have.

"Skating over thin ice" consists of references—usually veiled—to subject matter outside the pale of polite conversation. It is "sure-fire" stuff with a surprising number of people—good as long as the crowd around them is "right." Of course it is not a high type of humor and certainly it needs no particular encouragement, but it is found frequently even in the best regulated columns, and it must be reckoned with.

We shall leave the reader to find his own examples of such fun-making. Once his suspicions are

aroused, he will find more than he thinks for. There is only one rule for the columnist in regard to it. "Off-color" stuff should be the exception—and it should be much more clever than off-color. There is no place in a good column for a crude joke crudely handled. Upon occasion a crude situation cleverly turned is not half so bad as some people might have you think.

To discuss the use of the *risqué* in humorous columns without turning aside for a moment to glance at college humor would hardly be fair. Examine any substantial bulk of college humor and you will be impressed with the preponderence of matter that concerns itself with "petting" and the display of anatomy. One might think that the only thing that the comic artist need concern himself with is legs. One might conclude that any reference to spooning, or love-making of any sort, is a good joke—really about the only good one there is.

The *risqué* has been discussed and dismissed thus early because it is the most comfortable kind of sure-fire stuff to have done with. The greatest of humorists have indulged in it, do indulge in it, and will continue to indulge in it. The average columnist seems to feel it incumbent upon himself to shock some of his readers now and then in order to keep the rest of them in a good humor. Let us let him have his own way about it.

Another type of "sure-fire" stuff is clowning. Everyone should know that clowning is not con-

fined to circuses. There are clowns good and bad in every walk of life, and we find them, perforce, writing columns. All column writers clown now and then, some of them do it most of the time, others not so much. The column clown does much the same thing with words that his horizontal co-laborer, the comic-strip artist, does with drawings. He uses ridiculous exaggerations, obvious opposites, patent situations, and standard gags *ad infinitum*. Puns and other word tricks he perpetrates in abundance. A foreign name that has in it the slightest suggestion of anything English is sure to be pounced upon and worked for many times its worth.

No one can examine an American daily newspaper without being struck by the fact that its readers demand a seemingly extravagant amount of obvious humor. Most of the demand is met, it is true, by the comic strips, that do modern Punch and Judy for the delectation of the masses. But if one examines more closely, he will find other attempts to meet the demand. Even the most dignified or individualistic columnist frequently drops into crude sure-fire stuff, either for the want of something more subtle or because he feels the need of maintaining a sizable audience.

The columnist has plenty of precedent for indulging in clown stuff. Witness the following:

> A blockhead bit by fleas put out the light
> And, chuckling, cried, "Now you can't see to bite!"

Men die when the night-raven sings or cries,
But when Dick sings, e'en the night-raven dies.

These jingles lack twenty-five centuries of being modern. They are from two classic Greek wits. Here is another from the fifth century, A. D.:

A scholar hearing one of two twins was dead, when he met the other, asked, "Which of you was it that died? You or your brother?"

These are examples of sure-fire humor coming from the old-world philosophers and wits. If one wants more of it—and better,—let him open his Shakespeare and read Launcelot's attempt to rationalize his running away from the Jew his master, or any of the speeches of Shakespeare's clowns or even the ravings of the renowned Falstaff. Shakespeare could easily have written an entire sure-fire column before breakfast every morning.

Here is a famous poem by Oliver Goldsmith, illustrating excellently the use of clownish humor:

PARSON GRAY

A quiet home had Parson Gray,
Secluded in a vale;
His daughters all were feminine,
And all his sons were male.

How faithfully did Parson Gray
The bread of life dispense—

Well "posted" in theology,
And post and rail his fence.

'Gainst all the vices of the age
He manfully did battle;
His chickens were a biped breed,
And quadruped his cattle.

No clock more punctually went,
He ne'er delayed a minute—
Nor ever empty was his purse,
When he had money in it.

His piety was ne'er denied;
His truths hit saint and sinner;
At morn he always breakfasted;
He always dined at dinner.

He ne'er by any luck was grieved,
By any care perplexed—
No filcher he, though when he preached,
He always "took" a text.

As faithful characters he drew
As mortal every saw;
But, ah! poor parson, when he died,
His breath he could not draw.

Here is a quatrain by Thomas Moore:

"Come, come," said Tom's father, "at your time of life,
There's no longer excuse for this playing the rake.—

It is time you should think, boy, of taking a wife."—
"Why, so it is, father,—whose wife shall I take?"

Sure-fire humor in America got its start in the sixties. It was evolved largely in the West and in a way marks the beginning of newspaper column writing. George Horatio Derby, the writer of the "John Phœnix" papers, is generally credited with being the father of the new school of humor. Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward) and Henry Wheeler Shaw (Josh Billings) are much better known. The work of David Ross Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby) was also well known to our fathers and grandfathers. Edgar Wilson Nye (Bill Nye) was another of the school. He is perhaps better known to the present generation than any of the others.

All of these writers depended for their humor upon exaggeration, understatement, irreverence—any sort of utter absurdity—for their effects. Artemus Ward achieved much fame by his highly artistic misspelling. The short-haired woman and the long-haired man rated high as comic characters, and the cross-eyed woman with the garden hose was easily a leading lady. Aphorisms, usually in dialect, were supplied in abundance.

One cannot get a true conception of this type of humor without reading a considerable amount of it. A short selection is almost sure to give one a too high or a too low opinion of the author and the

type of humor. A half-hour's reading of such material—bound volumes of it can be had in almost any library—is usually sufficient to teach one its characteristics.

Now let us look at some quite recent material of the same sort. "Bugs" Baer supplies it in good quantity and good quality. Here is his reaction to a reported encounter between Geraldine Farrar and some agents of the Department of Justice:

Now that customs officials have invaded our united habits and are searching luggage for contraband of thirst, it remains to be seen just what privileges a traveler has en route.

The history of the world seems to be a catalogue of don'ts.

If a man wants to put a bottle of whatchacallem in his valise, is that any reason why seventeen revenue agents should claim his laundry mark is a code message to the Chinese government?

This searching outrage reached the boiling point when ultra-Canadian liquor gendarmes frisked Geraldine Farrar's private car and grabbed ten quarts of high, contralto notes.

They also got two cases of mellow soprano gargles. Has liberty reached that low ebb in synthetic freedom when a lady cannot buy her perfume by the keg?

Most of our opera stars read their music off wine lists. The baritones spray their throats with beer pumps. Caruso was the greatest singer that ever lived, and he always re-

fused to chirp unless he had his glass of wine. A dry axle always squeaks. Should we judge our larks by an ostrich's appetite?

This autocratic searching of a private car starts the world mooting on a moot question. The mooters from Mootsville want to know just how private a private car is and whether the sign "No Trespassing" is a warning or an invitation.

There is an idle rumor very busy right now. The germs of gossip claim that our millionaires are using their private cars for filling stations. They run 'em up into Canada and load 'em up with liquor like a rowboat under Niagara Falls. It is impossible for a society general to get a lower berth in his own private car, and the uppers are also wine cellars.

This rumor may be an empty paper bag. But, as a result of it, three dowagers have already been reduced to the ranks and the cotillion leaders are marking time on the Canadian border.

This year's crop of debutantes will be held back for a more favorable market and all our eligible bachelors are marrying European duchesses, whose family trees are brewery chimneys.

Twenty or thirty bottles of operatic elixir is no sign that our favorite opera star was going to find the greatest common divisor of the Eighteenth Amendment. It surely should be breaking no laws if you burn oil on an oil-burning road.

However, Geraldine's private car might as well be public now. The international sentries have put the padlocks on the boundary line. They're getting so suspicious now that revenue agents are looking under the seats of bicycles.

The only bright fly in the ointment is the beautiful sentiment displayed by a rich Philadelphian. He longed to perpetuate the memory of the old days without running foul of the law. So, last Xmas, he gave his little daughter a doll that was stuffed with sawdust from the old barroom floor.

But one does not have to go to the specialist in this kind of humor to find it. We have said that all columnists occasionally indulge in "sure-fire" stuff and that all of them "clown." Here are examples from representative best columns, by writers whose brows are usually quite high up on their foreheads:

Backward, turn backward, O Time in your flight,
Bring my red flannel undies to wear this June night.

A deadlock in a convention means that something around there is dead.

Leatrice Joy, the motion picture actress, reports Los Angeles, has received a divorce decree. Let Joy be unconfined.

"She's a nice girl but dumb," says Lucasta. "Why, when she shivers, she can't tell whether it's love or just the cold weather."

German economists are still faced with the problem of the idle Reich.

I'd find a lot more pleasure
In driving round at night;
If the lights on other motor cars
Were not so cussed bright.

He asked his sweetie would she like a bite after the show,
Then took her to the Skokie, where the largest skeeters grow.

One surprising omission we note on the list of witnesses at the Scopes trial and that is Billy Sunday. Why not let Billy in and make it a Sawdust trial?

As this here Darvin
Thing strikes me
It has us rather
Up a tree.

Hey, up there: Be careful where you're dropping them cocoanuts.

Nude colored hosiery has gone out of style. This will do a lot to relieve the eye strain.

Hon. Mr. Dempsey recently has embraced the matrimonial state. He should worry about fighting. He'll have plenty of it.

The old-fashioned boy may not have been able to enjoy modern improvements, but he had a lot to be spankful for.

Archy's Version

Dear boss
i met mehitable in the alley
this morning and i asked her
who was that tom i heard you
fighting with last night and she
said that wasn't no tom archy
that was a radio receiving set
what a guy in the block built
yesterday my god i said i
thought he was killing you or
vice versa no she said that
wasnt a cat a dying it was a
hetrodyne ha ha
yours

archy

It is quite a problem these days, when shaving oneself in the bathroom, to decide whether to let the fan blow the lather off or turn off the fan and have the lather slide off.

Latty, Ohio, asks women to join the fire department. Roll up them hose.

A little of this is quite enough, as this too much doth prove. As little as has been given is certainly a sufficiency. Either the writers were at a loss to finish out the day's grind or else (and this is more likely) they think it advisable to use something now and then that will amuse those who ap-

preciate only the broadest jokes and the most obvious humor.

Sure-fire column humor bears a strong resemblance to the sure-fire stage joke. The monologue artist with the rapid chatter about interesting things current and eternal—you have to listen to one on every bill of vaudeville—reels off a list of sure-fire jokes. But the actor has an enormous advantage over the columnist. He can use the same "line" day after day, retaining only that which goes over well, and he can study at first hand the effect of his efforts. For the most part the columnist never knows what happens.

Every columnist should be proficient at clown stuff and at restraining himself from its use—unless, of course, he aims to write a slap-stick column. Every columnist should have a card catalog—at least in his head—of sure-fire jokes and wheezes. They can be recruited from the antics of circus clowns, from vaudeville, from the ever-blooming fillers in newspapers and magazines. If he can dress them up in new and stylish togs when he sends them forth, so much the better; but such care is not absolutely necessary. They have more lives than a cat.

A favorite device in clowning is the pun. Every humorist, professional and amateur, indulges in punning, usually rather heavily at the beginning of what may turn out to be his career. Children begin to pun when they develop the trick of thinking in two directions at one time. They grow fond of puns along about the time their minds begin to

send out shoots. The punster gets his joy out of satisfaction with his own mental acrobatics; the reader gets his joy out of ability to follow the punster.

Practically everybody has said at one time or another that the pun is the lowest form of humor. Why it is both so popular and so condemned is hard to understand. Words in its praise are difficult to find, though occasionally an errant philosopher rushes to its defense. Charles Lamb makes the following plea in its favor:

> A pun is a noble thing *per se*. It is a sole digest of reflection; it is entire; it fills the mind; it is as perfect as a sonnet—better. It limps ashamed in the train and retinue of humor; it knows that it should have an establishment of its own.

Shakespeare used puns with such abandon as to make many of his present-day worshipers bite their lips in anguish. One cannot read any of the Elizabethans without deciding that the theater-goers then must have enjoyed puns as modern baseball fans enjoy peanuts. Maybe puns were thrown into the plays for the delectation of the groundlings, but more likely both the groundling and the sophisticated dandy enjoyed them equally.

Doubtless the average reader of humor feels that he knows too much about sure-fire stuff already. He knows it to be made up of flagrant puns, crude and persistent exaggeration, a maximum of words

and a minimum of ideas, a good deal of smart-Aleck slapstick and a frequent descent into the *risqué*. He knows it to be utterly irreverent and persistently shocking. But what can he, or anybody else, do about it?

One must realize that humor invariably leans away from genteelness and decorum, and that part of its business is to afford relief from the grip of the sanctions and approvals with which we afflict ourselves in order to acquire and maintain respectability. Humor is clownish by inheritance. Nobody likes his humor too well done. There is much to be said for the genius of the man who can write obvious humor day after day and at the same time build up and retain a big following. Most people want obvious humor.

Every wise columnist will, therefore, look carefully after the learning of tricks that are guaranteed to work. He will come to know that every now and then it will "pay" to run utterly obvious jokes, jokes that always have "got over," and always will.

VIII

The Epigram

HERE ought to be some other way of beginning a discussion of the epigram—some other way than saying that "brevity is the soul of wit." But it might be a difficult way to find, so we shall not risk a waste of time in hunting for it. All races and all ages have done homage to the man who crams his much wisdom into few words, and succeeding races and ages continue to do so. The columnist, who is looked upon as having more than ordinary wisdom, is expected to contribute his quota of epigrams. The better he can make them and the more he can contribute, the more fame he will garner.

We shall bluntly avoid one difficulty by making no effort to distinguish epigram, maxim, aphorism, axiom, and the numerous other classifications of concentrated wisdom. Lexicographers like to make nice distinctions among these terms, but in common usage "epigram" means any statement showing great condensation of thought. Properly and originally, an epigram is anything that is inscribed. It is closely related to the word "epigraph" or even "epitaph." For a long time "epigram" was used to denote inscriptions characterizing great men.

Let us, however, use the word "epigram" to mean a very brief statement in which, back of which, or around which, there is much wisdom or wit. An old rime characterizes it nicely:

> The qualities rare in a bee that we meet
> In an epigram never should fail;
> The body should always be little and sweet,
> And a sting should be left in the tail.

The column reader is always more interested in the sting than in the "little and sweet body," but one should remember that the sharpness of the sting depends entirely upon the sweet little body of thought that prepares the way.

The world, as was said, has always cherished its writers of epigrams—usually, of course, after they have departed. The epigrams of the Greeks, who boast of four periods of epigram writing, have always been considered to be the best. Many Roman writers made names for themselves as epigrammists, but the work of Catullus and Martial ranks highest, in spite of their tendency toward the crude and the obscene. In more modern days the French have succeeded best at the "salt" or "vinegar" type of epigram. Of course there is no age or civilization that does not point with much pride to the brilliant, pithy sayings of its great thinkers.

To explain why all peoples seem to expect epigrams of their wisest men would involve inquiry into human nature that would be long and doubtless

futile. Perhaps it is best to make a mere stab at it and say that the world at large, realizing unconsciously that clear thinkers are rare creatures, expects them to do the finished thinking. The highest type of abstract thinking must precede the creation of an epigram, which expresses in a clear, keen manner far-reaching truth that the mass of people have dimly perceived and half realized. People take delight in an epigram because they feel that something has been expressed exquisitely that has long been struggling for expression.

To attempt to tell how to write epigrams—that is a very different thing from writing about them. They are very delightful things to read and to talk about. If they are good, however, they represent such condensation of thought that it were useless to speculate upon the ratiocinative processes that bring them into form. It is easy enough to say that one should gather in a lot of related wisdom and boil it down to a very few words that instantly seize the interest and immediately thereafter satisfy the curiosity in a clever and unexpected manner. But it is difficult to tell how such a thing is to be done.

Suppose we examine a list of epigrams that the world has seen fit to save. Maybe the art of writing them is catching.

A philosopher is a fool who torments himself while he is alive, to be talked of after he is dead.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

If you measure your shadow, you will find it no greater than before the victory.

Plato is dear, but truth still dearer.

Assassination has never changed the history of the world.

Doctrine is nothing but the skin of truth set up and stuffed.

No man was ever written down except by himself.

There are no ugly women: there are only women who do not know how to look pretty.

There is so much trouble in coming into the world, and so much more, as well as meanness, in going out of it, that it is hardly worth while to be here at all.

Silence gives consent.

Like the measles, love is most dangerous when it comes late in life.

Better be first in a village than second in Rome.

Would that the Roman people had but one neck.

Great men are not born among fools.

You must look into people, as well as at them.

Whoever is in a hurry shows that the thing he is about is too big for him.

I love men, not because they are men, but because they are not women.

To err is human, to forgive, divine.

While there's life, there's hope.

Good and bad men are each less so than they seem.

I hate war: it spoils armies.

Put your trust in God, but be sure that your powder is dry.

It is better to wear out than to rust out.

For he who fights and runs away
May live to fight another day.

The first step toward philosophy is incredulity.

There are three things I have always loved, and never understood,—painting, music, and woman.

Nothing is certain but death and taxes.

Architecture is petrified music.

Much may be made of a Scotchman, if he be caught young.

Never speak of a man in his own presence. It is always indelicate, and may be offensive.

Love never dies of starvation, but often of indigestion.

Life would be quite tolerable, if it were not for its amusements.

One tongue is sufficient for a woman.

You can always get the truth from an American statesman after he has turned seventy, or given up all hope of the presidency.

Show me six lines written by the most honest man in the world, and I will find enough therein to hang him.

It does not much signify whom one marries, as one is sure to find next morning that it was some one else.

A proverb is the wisdom of many and the wit of one.

Speech was given to man to conceal his thoughts.

Ideas are like beards: children and women never have them.

Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.

These are epigrams that the world has seen fit to save. One can be reasonably sure about their worth. In compiling a list of recent column epigrams, one runs more risks.

The reader will recognize the unfairness—even the absurdity—of comparing the epigrams of the

world's greatest minds of all time with the epigrams of a few present-day newspaper columnists. It is unfair, but at the same time complimentary, to column humor. The columnist of recent years who has accomplished most in the making of epigrams, is Don Marquis. He is a consistent coiner of epigrams, and therefore a good one. Here are some samples of his very recent work:

"You can't fool all the people all the time"—some of them are so busy fooling themselves.

Now and then a person is born so unlucky that he meets with accidents that started out to happen to someone else.

A paradox is the spark produced by the meeting of the positive and negative poles of an electric truth.

As we grow older we must take
Such comfort as we may—
We cannot in the selfsame spots
Be bald as well as gray.

Bootlegging is what happens when an Irresistible Thirst meets an Immovable Law.

The only real excuse any Age has for existing is to produce a few men that are ahead of it.

It takes all sorts of people to make an underworld.

A vagabond is the only kind of bond not subject to fluctuations in the market.

The humorist is a philosopher who breaks the sad news gently to the world because he is sorry for it.

The following list is made up of recent paragraphs good enough to have been quoted often. Supplementary lists can be found each week in the *Literary Digest* and other review magazines.

Uncle Sam believes in the open door in China—if he can keep it open without putting his foot in it.

This is a grand country, but if you are laboring under the impression that it is free, try saying something which does not coincide with the fixed beliefs of the community in which you reside.

The least of Mr. Bryan's worries should be the fact that he has been called a blockhead by G. Bernard Shaw. No public man has achieved real recognition till he has been called a blockhead by Mr. Shaw.

All the other ailments combined never have killed and maimed one quarter of the number who die each year because they are bored.

Mr. Pomeroy likes to drive to church, he says, because it is one place where you can find a place to park.

Mable says a ring on the finger is worth two on the phone.

One of the biggest jobs you can undertake is to try to have a big time with the money you forgot to save.

On hot days it is cooling if one has nothing on him but an electric fan.

A friend is an acquaintance who never borrowed money from you and never loaned you any.

The foregoing lists are not proposed as the world's best epigrams, nor the season's best. They are merely representative. Each one of them should be studied leisurely, just to see how much, or how little, thought clings around it. The thought may be profound or trivial, it may be heavily serious or lightly cynical. All of them, you will readily note, suggest much more than they say.

Since thought hovers around epigrams rather than lies in them, it is hardly ever safe to point out the full meaning of one of them. The epigram is enjoyed because it compliments the reader by assuming that he can readily get the surrounding meaning for himself. The meaning of an epigram is always what it means to the reader. The writer does not attempt to control the reader's thought except by implication—a poor sort of control, but a pleasing one.

There is, therefore, only one thing for the student of epigrams to do—spend much time reading epigrams and more time thinking out what they mean to him. If he can, at some lucky moment, reverse this process and coin an epigram from a body of thought, mayhap he may learn to write them. Orig-

inality is not a prime requisite at the beginning. Most of the good epigrams have already been written, anyway. A slavish sort of imitation may be the entering wedge, provided some original thinking is done in each case.

The famous phrase attributed to Cicero: "While there's life, there's hope," lends itself readily to the kind of imitation we mean. It can be twisted around, turned upside down or wrong side out, rearranged in almost any way with fairly good results. The cynic might say: "While there's death, there's hope," or "While there's life, there's hopelessness," and summarize much of the philosophy of pessimism. The wit who turned "Where there's a will, there's a way" into "Where there's a will, there's a lawsuit" did some original thinking, in spite of the slavish following of his model.

The advantage of paraphrasing well-known epigrams is that the writer gradually and unconsciously acquires a sort of epigrammatic sentence structure and also a habit of condensation. To set out to learn to write epigrams in a cold, synthetical manner, with everything logic and nothing imitation and thought-sensing, is almost sure to result in failure, for, after all, the best epigrams come with a burst and a bound, and they are quite often surcharged with feeling.

But it is not impossible to build an epigram almost as mechanically as one might assemble an egg crate. Suppose that we try it. We are asked to contribute an epigram on the subject of college life. We feel a

bit cynical and resolve to follow our mood. Consequently we look for something absurd in college life. Of course, absurdity is easy to find anywhere, particularly easy in college. Why do people go to college? Presumably to prepare themselves for life, which to most of us means making a living. But only a few people in college support themselves for the four years they are there. Instead, they depend on father to furnish the living. Quite often they live on a level considerably above that which they can hope to maintain when they depend upon themselves alone. Here is surely situation enough for an epigram.

Now for the task, the big task, of finding a short statement that will summarize what we think of the absurdity of achieving independence and self-reliance by increasing our dependence on Dad for four years or more.

In college one learns to make a living by not earning a cent for four years.

The business of college is to fit young men and women for life by relieving them of the necessity for earning a living.

College proposes to teach William how to write checks on himself by encouraging him to write checks on father.

None of these is proposed as a model epigram. If you will think five minutes longer, you can coin a much better one; ten minutes longer, a still better

one. When epigrams are being manufactured in a cold-blooded, methodical manner such as this, their excellence—if they have excellence—varies directly with the amount of time spent in thinking them out.

The value of pondering upon subjects with the view to summarizing much thought in a few words is incalculable to the would-be writer of epigrams. If there is any chance that a "good" writer of epigrams can be made—after not having been born—this is the only hope. The process sounds crude and impossible as a means of coining epigrams, but somehow or other it seems to work fairly well after a time. Habits of thinking are no less habits than are habits of eating, and abstract thinking of this sort can be cultivated. There is altogether too little of it in the world, and no chance to increase the amount is too desperate to be taken.

Most of our fondest opinions, sanctions, and conclusions, which represent our most nearly normal approach to epigrams, are slipped to us by the herd while we are more or less in a state of coma. We do not arrive at them logically, and we trust them all the more because we do not know how we came by them. List ten of your profoundest beliefs about things being good or bad, proper or improper, moral or immoral, advisable or inadvisable. Then examine the background of each belief. If by some mischance you have arrived at one of them scientifically and logically, you have been doing the kind of thinking that leads to epigram making.

The column epigram is usually, of course, of the

lighter, more cynical type. The writer colors it with his professional affectation of indifference. Frequently it is built to shock the conventional and perfunctory majority who rule the world and all that is therein. By shocking people somewhat, but not too much, the columnist achieves a reputation for individuality and difference. Followers flock to him for the purpose of being shocked and scandalized.

The columnist is in an ideal position to coin epigrams and pet phrases, for he is neither elected by popular vote nor expected to accomplish anything. If he were a political leader, overladen with responsibility and crying for more, he would have to be much more careful and much more fearful of a vicious rebound. Theodore Roosevelt is an example of a very lucky phrase maker and epigram coiner. Woodrow Wilson is an example of a very unlucky one. The latter's "too proud to fight" and "make the world safe for democracy" went well for a time, but there was too much dynamite in them and enemies and critics made them ridiculous. If Wilson had been a columnist instead of a great leader, the world would not have bothered to take him so seriously and—strange as it may seem—might have learned much more from him.

However, the place of the epigram is, after all, not to itself. It needs contrast, and it belongs, therefore, in the midst of other material that is more sedate and less active. The epigram functions best in deliberate surroundings, where thought is moving along in a slow but steady stream. Consequently,

the searcher after good epigrams must not expect always to find them isolated or otherwise conspicuously set off. The best of them are often found in obscure parts of paragraphs. Good epigrams often seem to come without premeditation. They arrive explosively. They are likely to be buried deep among duller sentences, and they can be found only by careful searching.

IX

Jingle

INGLES are so numerous and so well liked, and have always been so numerous and well liked, that any attempt to explain their popularity is headed for wreck. If one could understand the remarkable longevity of *Hickory Dickory Dock* and *Hey Diddle Diddle,* or of any of the noble work of Mother Goose, one could probably explain why man is so fond of the jingle type of poetry. There is something in a good jingle that appeals to man's instinctive desire for rhythm and harmony. He must have that rhythm and harmony to keep him happy. That's about all.

It does not seem to be essential that jingles have much meaning; indeed, they seem to succeed in proportion as they progress from sense to interesting but unexplainable nonsense. The minute a Mother Goose rime is explained, its charm begins to limp. Good nonsense rimes have a sense that is much more delightful than the common sense they violate. All good jingles have a touch of the nonsensical or the absurd. They betray a poorly concealed disdain for common sense.

Not all columnists write jingle. Not all of them can. But most of them who can, do. All of them realize the tremendous appeal of the kind of jingle that reveals a keen and delightful appreciation of the absurd. Those who court contributions are always pleased to get hold of jingle forms that are easily imitated or parodied. Hence the constant and often wearisome reappearance of limericks in columns, for the limerick is a rollicking form well suited to the capabilities of amateurs. Hence also such verses as the following, which are good enough to have got lost from their authors:

Lay a rose on the bier of Maude Muller De Cloude,
She wrote free-verse poems—and read them aloud.

Said Teddy Dreiser to J. B. Cabell,
"Haven't we raised an awful gabble?"
"Yes, we really should be nicer,"
Said J. B. Cabell to Teddy Dreiser.

These, together with numerous other examples you will readily recall, exhibit the good qualities that are found in good column jingle: they are delightfully unserious, they run readily off the tongue, they waste no words, they are strongly rhythmic, and they are euphonious. They call for no puzzling and no study—their meaning is the most evident thing about them. And last, but not at all least, they are permeated with a feeling of "smiley" good humor. They almost, but not quite, call for an audible laugh.

Now if we go any further into the mystery of

column jingle, we shall have to go by the only known path—the reading and enjoying of good examples. Here are some interesting specimens. First of all are some "standard" limericks, so often quoted that their "original" authors are quite beyond determination.

There was an old soldier of Bister
Went walking one day with his sister;
  When a cow, at one poke,
  Tossed her into an oak
Before the old gentlemen missed her.

For beauty I am not a star;
There are others more handsome by far;
  But my face, I don't mind it,
  For I am behind it—
It's the people in front that I jar.

A freshman from the Amazon
Put nighties of his Grammazon;
  The reason was that
  He was too fat
To get his own Pajamazon.

There was a good Canon of Durham
Who fished with a hook and a worrum.
  Said he to the bishop,
  "I've brought a big fish up,
But I fear we may have to inter'm."

There was a young man of Quebec
Whom they found in the snow to his neck,

When they asked, "Iz you friz?"
He replied, "Yes, I iz—
But we don't call that Cold in Quebec."

Utter nonsense, you say? Certainly. But why not?

Here are some jingles by Keith Preston in "Hit or Miss," in the Chicago *Daily News:*

TO A POLLYWOG

Poor little thing, you are so cute;
Too bad you have to evolute!
If Mr. Bryan had his way
A pollywog you'd always stay!

WOMEN

Once set apart as kittle cattle,
Given to tea and tittle-tattle,
Behold 'em in life's hustle-bustle
Now up to man in mind and muscle.

They ballot with the raggle-taggle;
In business life they higgle-haggle;
They straphang with the manly tugger;
In motors they ride hugger-mugger.

On football fields they boola-boola;
On dancing floors they hula-hula;
In every walk of life they double
Our stress and strain and toil and trouble.

INCIDENT ILLUSTRATING THE RAPACITY OF LITERARY AGENTS

Willie let a little pun drop;
Papa sold it to "The Fun Shop."
Willie wailed, "Don't I get any?"
Papa handed him a penny.

"Why," yelled Willie, "that's atrocious!
It don't pay to be precocious!"
"Be a good boy and don't holler,"
Pa said, pocketing his dollar.

SEPTEMBER

Though fall sees no end to the dog days,
We state in a confident tone,
The month that comes in like a hot dog
Goes out like an ice cream cone.

FOLKS

Folks never sleep; they always "snooze;"
Folks do not drink; they only "booze";
Folks don't perspire; they'd rather "sweat";
Folks never sit when they can "set."

THE ACME OF OSCULATION

Even kissing is better outdoors. When you chase a girl half a mile to kiss her you realize what real kissing is.—Dr. Crane in the *Daily News*.

Let others laud indoor endearments
From maidens too easily won.

Give me the chaste kiss of a cross-country miss
At the end of a marathon run;

A kiss like Apollo gave Daphne,
Refusing to call himself stumped;
Though she'd turned to a tree, on her bark one could see
The dent where his beezer had bumped.

The following jingles are from "A Line o' Type or Two" of the Chicago *Tribune,* where Richard Henry Little (R. H. L.) now seems to be having much the same kind of high success in attracting good contributors that B. L. T. had:

I think—I hear—a bootlegger calling—from that there
al-al-lee;
He calls so sweet—sweet—sweet, I think he's paging me;
Now a bootlegger is an awful thing—a curse to so-ci-e-tee,
But when there's one—in an al-al-lee—I hope he's paging me.

Mah Jong is a game that's played by the rich—
It takes all your money and gives you the itch!

OH DEAR COMMA SHE WAILED!

The man who works beside me
Looks like a sheik
His shoes are shining brightly
His hair is sleek
His eyes are warm and glassy
They make me weak—
But oh, I cannot love him—
He chews his cheek.

—Hope Deferred.

TWO COMMANDERS

Yell, my babe, with shrieks diurnal,
Call for me with howls infernal,
Rout me up with yowls nocturnal;
Back a page in my life's journal,
You remind me of my Colonel.

Though not such a tough dragoon, you're
As I was to him, the junior;
Loud as ever you may tune your
Front-and-Center call, it's punier.
Old line, hard-boiled, soldier mellow,
Even as he used to bellow;
He, too, gave me merry hell—Oh,
I don't mind commands, young fellow.

—THE SOLICITOR

In the following gentle manner, a contributor, N. D. Plume, kidded Frank Sullivan while he was subbing in "The Conning Tower" for Franklin P. Adams.

A RESIGNATION

My lines are crude and my rhymes are rough;
I'm far from a writing wiz,
Yet F. P. A. has printed my stuff
And it always was worse than his.

But now the standard that you demand
Means death to The Tower's lures,

For how can I ever expect to land
If my stuff must be worse than yours?
—N. D. PLUME.

Ted Robinson, of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer,* writes jingle and verse so easily and so copiously that it is often hard to tell which is which. Here are two of his productions. If you think they should be considered verse rather than jingle, well and good. They are not far from the border line in either direction.

CENSORED

(The W. C. T. U. of Lyons, Kas., believe that Mother Goose should be censored, and all passages referring to liquor and tobacco expunged).

I

Old King Cole
Was a moral old soul,
And a holy old soul was he;
He called for his milk
And his cinnamon roll
And enforcement officers three.

II

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of pop,
Four and twenty White Doves purchased at the shop.
When the pie was opened, the doves sang gospel hymns,
And all wore broadcloth pantalets to hide their lower limbs.

III

I had a little husband, no bigger than my thumb,
I put him in a pint pot (of the kind used for measuring molasses) and there I bid him drum.

WHATYOUMAYCALLHER

(The Florida legislature has a bill making it a misdemeanor to refer to a girl as a "flapper.")

I'm going down to Miami town
  Next winter, if I'm able,
To flee from the freeze of the Erie breeze
  And favor a health unstable,
And to lamp the peaches that grow on beaches,
  Mimi and Maude and Mabel.

But oh, it's careful I must be
  When I flag these tender beauties;
All joyously I shall murmur, "See
  That bevy of tutti-fruttis!
Oh, look at the frail! Oh, pipe the She!
  Oh, notice this flock of cuties!"

I may call them squabs or shingle-bobs,
  I may call them skirts or Susies;
I may call them Mames or rags or dames,
  Chickens or janes or floozies—
But if ever I'm heard to pronounce That Word
  I'll be one of the jail's Who's-whosies!

It's not improper to call her a flopper,
  Provided she's young and dapper;

And if I should slip her a name like flipper,
I shouldn't be thought to rap her;
But I know I'd be pinched, and probably lynched,
If I uttered that vile name, "Fl . . . . r!"

Don Marquis can actually write free-verse jingle, as will be seen by the second of the two following offerings:

THE SUBURBAN GARDEN

There's many a garden planned to-day
That blooms in the wind so blithe and gay
Will look like Hell by the last of May.

a good many
failures are happy
because they don't
realize it many a
cockroach believes
himself as beautiful
as a butterfly
have a heart o have
a heart and
let them dream on

archy

And here are three bits of jingle by B. L. T., some of whose more serious verse is going to have a hard time being forgotten in America:

SIMPLE

My readers are a varied lot;
Their tastes do not agree.

A squib that tickles A is not
At all the thing for B.

What's the sense to J, is folderol
To K, but pleases Q.
So when I come to fill the Col,
I know just what to do.

UPON JULIA'S ARCTICS

Whenas galoshed my Julia goes,
Unbuckled all from top to toes,
How swift the poem becometh prose!
And when I cast mine eyes and see
Those arctics flopping each way free,
Oh, how that flopping floppeth me!

I want to be a diplomat
And with the envoys stand,
A-wetting of my whistle in
A desiccated land.

You may remember John D. Rockefeller's poem, given to the press on the occasion of his eighty-sixth birthday. Here is the fun F. P. A. had with it:

In the literary and swimming set of Long Island's semi-exclusive North Shore, little was discussed Sunday but Mr. John D. Rockefeller's poem. "I think it is very good," was Mr. Ring W. Lardner's enthusiastic comment. "Delightful," said Mr. Michael Arlen, who was visiting the Kahns, the Lardners, the Swopes, and the Baragwanaths. The consensus was that no extremely rich oil man, at the age of eighty-six, ever had written a better poem. Many com-

mitted it to memory, and all day long, above the ping of ball against racquet and the swish of ball against mallet could be heard voices intoning—

> I was early taught to work as well as play;
> My life has been one long, happy holiday,
> Full of work and full of play—
> I dropped the worry on the way—
> And God was good to me every day.

It was decided also that Mr. Rockefeller's dainty verses would arouse other men of wealth to the composition of poetry. Mr. Cyrus H. K. Curtis, who, according to his income tax statement, is far from impecunious, might be stirred to the following cinquain:

I always obeyed the precepts maternal,
I had confidence that was supernal.
The *Public Ledger* is a diurnal.
But the publications whereby I earn a l—
Ot of money are the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies' Home Journal.*

And perhaps Mr. Henry Ford might be counted on to be inspired thus:

In my early youth I did decide
People didn't like to walk as well as ride.
And that is the reason why I tried
With Heaven always as my guide,
To make an automobile which now is known far and wide.

So far, so good—and so easy. Good jingle is

pleasant to take, but not so easy to make. And trying to tell how to write successful jingle is still harder. If the instruction could be put in the form of a recipe, it might be not so hard. Take a well developed sense of rhythm, a rare ability to rime, a clever idea, a sense of humor, and a passion for stopping the very second you are done; mix them, remove all specks and splotches, smooth and polish the mixture very, very carefully—and you may succeed. It is said to be not so hard, after you have practiced faithfully and long.

The best way to get started is by writing parodies of well-known rimes or jingles that you have known and recited for months or years. Without regard to sense or meaning write parodies on *Mary Had a Little Lamb; Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star; My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean;* and others that have settled well into your subconscious. Write them until it quits hurting, and you may discover that your sense of rhythm and your ability to rime are not so hopeless as you have always thought they were. Then after meaningless jingling has become more or less easy, take an idea and try to dress it on one of these verse forms. Make your jingles express some pungent truth, but don't let up on the jingle qualities.

After a time you will observe that certain situations and certain ideas seem to lend themselves to expression in light verse. What the tell-tale characteristics of those situations and ideas are is very

hard to say. Somehow or other they seem to tell on themselves. They must come with a sort of flash, or they had better not come at all.

After the period of parody has worn its welcome out, it is well to pass to a less slavish imitation of particularly striking and interesting examples of good jingle. Try imitating a few of the best examples you have just read, using new situations and different ideas. Work hard and persistently. Sooner or later you will discover that groups of words—even whole lines—come to your mind in proper order to fit into the jingle. You will also notice that it grows less and less difficult to think of words to rime with other words.

The writer is quite aware that he is not trying to tell anyone how to become a poet. He is discussing primarily the mechanics of jingles, and the mechanics can be learned by the patient and persistent student. Imitation, practice, and experimentation—much of all three—will get results. Some people will learn much faster than others, some will go much farther than others; but it is possible for everyone to make considerable and satisfactory progress.

Jingle writers have an advantage over poets. They can be made. Poets, alas, have to be born. Just what success you will have in jingling and poem making—depends. Success or no success, however, there is much good fun in trying. One is always sure to amuse himself. Others may laugh if they care to.

X

Column Verse

EWSPAPERS have long been reasonably hospitable to verse. If verse will do nothing else, it will fill awkward spaces. It has not always been printed for its own sake, but has been used because it fits in—too often in an entirely spatial sense.

It is not strange then that columnists, who will try anything, have shown a marked liking for jingle and verse. Jingle they have taken to quite greedily. The very light, comic verse has been scarcely less popular with them. But the more serious light verse, comparable in every way to vers de société of the best periods, has been slower in arriving. It is, however, steadily gaining in both quality and quantity, so that if one were looking for society verse today, he would not dare pass over the humorous columns in his search.

Column verse is hopelessly varied in form, dignity, and mood. It runs from just above jingle to poems that rival the neatest productions of the famous Cavalier poets. Where the jingle leaves off and the better poetry begins it is of course unwise

if not impossible to say. Some of the offerings can hardly be considered light at all, though the serious poem is noticeably rare.

The recent tendency to make columns more dignified, more literary, or more critical in tone has opened the way for more serious productions by the conductor and the contributor. Indeed, not a few columns have experimented with verse that easily highbrows a large number of the column's followers. Bert Leston Taylor frequently used verse that was far above the taste of the average reader of the "Line o' Type." Richard Henry Little continues to receive and print contributions of extremely high merit.

Keith Preston, conductor of the "Hit or Miss" column in the Chicago *Daily News* recently compiled and edited an anthology of light verse appearing in the humorous columns of two Chicago papers.[1] An hour or so spent with the volume will convince the most skeptical that column verse is frequently of fine quality and that there is merit to Mr. Preston's contention that the column poets must to be taken seriously, even more seriously than many of the recent so-called schools of poets.

But one should not get the impression that much of the newspaper column is filled with serious, subtle verse. Most of the effects are quite broad, and most of the verse does not outlive the issue of the paper in which it is printed. Column verse, as a whole, is a modern, journalistic type of mixed jingle

[1] Column Poets, published by Pascal Covici, Chicago.

and *vers de société,* quite undignified and not aspiring to respectability. But this does not prevent there being a cream of really good verse in papers where it is encouraged.

Column verse has not shown the tendency to freakishness exhibited by the more serious kinds of poetry during the past few years. There have quite naturally been numerous examples of satirical parody of the more extravagant manners of the free-versifiers and the impressionists, but column poetry on the whole has remained loyal to conventional forms. The dedication of all column efforts to the preservation of sanity and common sense works against extremes of all kinds. Humor is congenitally antagonistic to new forms of art.

Any attempt at classification of the poetry appearing in columns is likely to prove futile. If the column conductors wrote it all themselves, there would be a great enough diversity. But one must remember that besides the conductors there are contributors and contributors, who have all sorts of notions about poems and what should go into poems, especially into humorous poems.

Column poetry may be about everything from nothing to anything. It may preach or rant or coo or shout or sing or snort or snicker. No doubt it is too much given to snorting and snickering, but so are columns themselves. It would be only natural that column verse should show the faults and frailties of columns. In the main, however, column verse is critical of the life of the times. It may

usually be counted upon to scandalize the painfully good. It parodies and burlesques without quarter.

The only way to learn to write column verse—if there is a way—is to imitate the work of the best column verse writers. Much more native ability is required than is needed for the writing of jingle. The first thing that one should do is to be careful to be born with a predisposition to poetizing. Then there must be a reading of much poetry and a good deal of practice in composition. Conscious imitation is the first stage. Gradually the imitation must become less slavish. Last comes the stage of originality—and pride in originality.

It is indeed a privilege to be introduced to column verse by Franklin P. Adams, of the Conning Tower. What he attempts to do and what he and other good verse writers do not often get credit for doing are nicely stated in the following poems:

"WHY DON'T YOU DO SOMETHING BIG?"

The Comic Bard is supposed to sigh
For the skill and the power to make you cry;
He's supposed to yearn, when he has the time,
To make you sob as you read his rime.
That thought in many a bard may be;
I only know how the thing strikes me.
For mine aim is low, mine ambish atomic:
I'm tickled to death when they call me comic.

FREQUENTLY

I shot a poem into the air,
It was reprinted everywhere

From Bangor to the Rocky Range—
And always credited to

—Exchange.

F. P. A. keeps the tone of most of his verse light and airy. He seems always to have in mind the hurried reader who will stop only long enough for a quiet chuckle. However, he is not prejudiced against taking a dig at absurdity now and then. One of his best parodies and three pieces of typical satire follow:

THE TIRED BUSINESS MAN'S SONG

The day is done, and the darkness
  Falls from the wings of night,
As it did in the bygone evenings
  When Longfellow used to write.

I lamp the lights of the city,
  The scintillant signs of the town,
And a feeling of gladness comes o'er me
  That simply will not down.

A feeling of gladness and longing
  That is not akin to joy,
And resembles sorrow only
  As Tanguay resembles Foy.

Come, sing to me some lyric,
  Some sinful and stupid lay;

The sort that the Western buyers
  Applaud at a cabaret.

Not from the grand old masters,
  Not from the highbrow bunch,
Who make the music-lovers
  Assert that they had the punch.

For, like strains of Debussy music,
  They make me ready to drop
Into deep and endless slumber,
  And tonight I long for slop.

Play from some ragtime lyrist,
  Whose songs gush'd Heav'n knows whence
As wilful and naughty children
  Will write with chalk on the fence;

Who, down in Tin-Pan Alley,
  Or elsewhere I may not hint,
"Composed" the commonplace "music,"
  Or the words unfit for print.

Such songs have power to riot
  The sluggish pulse of care,
From the Anaconda Wriggle
  To the sin-sin Cinnamon Bear.

Then play from that aggregation
  The rag with the utmost pep,
And lend to the tune of the lyrist
  The grace of the newest step.

And the night shall be filled with ragtime,
And the songs of an elder day
Shall repose in the camphored storehouse
With "Forsaken" and "Nelly Gray."

THE NEO-NEOISM

My cup is empty to-night,
Cold and dry are its sides,
Chilled by the wind from the open window,
Empty and void, it sparkles white in the moonlight.
The room is filled with the strange scent
Of wistaria blossoms.
They sway in the moon's radiance
And tap against the wall.
But the cup of my heart is still,
And cold, and empty.

—From "Absence," by Amy Lowell
in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

I have been paying attention
To the various movements in Art,
In Fiction and Poetry, particularly.
Most of them I am unable to imitate, even if I cared to do so.
Some of them are sincere;
Most of them are phony.
Frank discussion of human relations
Is a fine thing; I am for it.
But Art for Obstetrics' sake, that, Mawruss,
Is something else again,
As to the New Poetry, should you ask me,
I should answer, No.
Briefly, and in a word, NO!

Henley could do it, but Witter Bynner and Amy Lowell can't.
Neither can I.

DOVE RIVER ANTHOLOGY

By Our Own William Wordsworth

LUCY GRAY

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Near Dove Springs Junction;
A girl whom nobody ever praised,
A maiden whose lovers were few.
A dandelion by a mossy boulder,
Fair as a solitary shining star,
She lived unknown.
Few were informed of her death.
But it made a difference to some.
Eh, William Wordsworth?

TO HIS LYRE

Ad Lyram

Horace: Book I, Ode 32
"Poscimur. Si quid vacui sub umbra—"

If ever, as I struck thy strings,
I've sounded one enduring note,
Let me, O Lyre, think up some things
That folks will simply have to quote.

A Lesbian lyrist owned thee once;
He used to sing a lot, he did,

Of dames and demijohns and stunts
Like that. He was the Tuneful Kid.

Help me, mine ancient ukulele,
Sing songs of sorrow and of joy,
Such as, composed and printed daily,
Will make the public yell, "Oh, boy!"

That the column poet keeps abreast of the times is illustrated in the following group of three poems, which touch upon psychoanalysis, hi-jacking, and the percolation of coffee. If these three poems do not prove that column verse can be upon any subject whatever, such a fact cannot be proved.

REFERRED

Young William Wynn met Kitty Coy,
By stealth beside the orchard wall.
Their parents on the lovers frowned—
(See "Adolesence," Stanley Hall).

They kissed and clung and clung and kissed,
In ardent union overjoyed;
Then each minutely questioned each—
(See "Psychanalysis," by Freud).

Their libidos the two discussed,
Their complexes they classified—
(These terms elucidated find
In A. Tridon's "Freud Simplified").

"Unshackle your repression, love!
Say you'll elope with me!" cried Bill,

She breathed a hesitant assent—
(See "Inhibitions," A. A. Brill).

Straight to a minister they flew,
(Of course the old folks went to pieces),
Then settled down to married life—
(See Darwin's "Origin of Species").

—Blanche.

NOCTURNE

It was the sweetest little lady stickup;
So saintly good was she
The cops all wondered where the kid could pick up
Such perfect piety.

She cast her eyes up in a kind of glory,
Most mystical and meek:
"Oh Gawd!" she prayed (it made a front page story),
"Don't let 'em catch my sheik!"

The cops all started in to sniff and hiccup,
The sob sisters to sob.
"Ums is the loveliest little lady stickup
That ever pulled a job."

The captain banged his fist upon the table;
(The sob sisters all flinched);
"Girlie," he choked, as well as he was able,
"Your boy friend shan't be pinched!"

—Keith Preston.

SOUTH SHORE LINES

Leander swam
the Hellespont

in the golden days
of yore
through moonlit tide
he sought his bride
we commute
on the cool
South-Shore

Hero lit
in her wave-washed tower
a lantern
to guide her mate
Anthea yearns
as the gasoline burns
for the coffee
to percolate
the moral of this
we would not know
but ever
the sunset sea
ripples rose and gold
sure the gods
of old
are smiling on
Anthea and me.

—Riq.

To attempt to analyze, or even to characterize, the pungency of the late Bert Leston Taylor's column verse would be a task for a very, very presumptive individual. Here are two examples quite adept at being their own excuse for being:

ARMS AND THE COLYUM

I sing of arms and heroes, not because
  I'm thrilled by what these heroes do or die for:
The Colyum's readers think they make its laws,
  And I make out to give them what they cry for.

And since they cry for stuff about the war,
  Since war at this safe distance not to them's hell,
I have to write of things that I abhor,
  And far, strange battlegrounds like Ypres and Przemysl.

War is an almost perfect rime for bore;
  And, 'spite my readers (who have cursed and blessed me),
Some day I'll throw the war junk on the floor,
  And write of things that really interest me:

Of books in running brooks, and wilding wings,
  Of music, stardust, children, casements giving
On seas unvext by wars, and other things
  That help to make our brief life worth the living.

I sing of arms and heroes, just because
  All else is shadowed by that topic fearful;
But I've a mind to chuck it [Loud applause],
  And tune my dollar harp to themes more cheerful.

GARDENS

My lady hath a garden fair,
  Wherein she whiles her hours:
She chides me that I do not share
  Her rage for springing flowers.

I tell her I've a garden, too,
Wherein I have to toil—
The kind that Epicurus knew,
If not so good a soil.

And I must till my patch with care,
And watch its daily needs;
For lacking water, sun, and air,
The place would run to weeds.

In this the garden of the mind,
My flowers are all too few;
Yet am I well content to find
A modest bloom or two.

My lady hath a garden fair,
Or will when buds are blown:
I've but a blossom here and there—
Poor posies, but mine own.

All of the poems quoted so far can safely be considered "typical" column poems. They "seem" to belong in humorous columns. In them the reader is time and again reminded that he must not expect too much, that the writer is only fooling.

The poems which follow show the tendency of many of the better columnists to write and to print a more serious type of verse—not so serious in appearance perhaps, but certainly less unserious than the verse you have just been reading.

BALLADE OF THE OUBLIETTE.

And deeper still the deep-down oubliette,
Down thirty feet below the smiling day.
—Tennyson.

Sudden in the sun
An oubliette winks. Where is he? Gone.
—Mrs. Browning.

Gaoler of the donjon deep—
Black from pit to parapet—
In whose depths forever sleep
Famous bores whose sun has set,
Daily ope the portal; let
In the bores who daily bore.
Thrust—sans sorrow or regret—
Thrust them through the Little Door.

Warder of Oblivion's keep—
Dismal dank, and black as jet—
Through the fatal wicket sweep
All the pests we all have met.
Prithee, overlook no bet;
Grab them—singly, by the score—
And, lest they be with us yet,
Thrust them through the Little Door.

Lead them to the awful leap
With a merry chansonette;
Push them blithely off the steep;
We'll forgive them and forget.
Toss them, like a cigarette,
To the far Plutonian floor.
Drop them where they'll cease to fret—
Thrust them through the Little Door.

Keeper of the Oubliette,
Wouldst thou have us more and more

In thine everlasting debt—
Thrust them through the Little Door.

—Bert Leston Taylor.

EMPTYS CUMING BACK

have you evur sat by the r. r. track
& watched the emptys cuming back
lumburing along with a groan and a whine—
smoke strung out in long gray line
belched from the panting injun's stack
. . . just emptys cuming back.

i have . . . and to me the emptys seam
like dreams i sometimes dream—
of a girl . . . or munney . . . or maybe fame . . .

my dreams have all returned the same,
swinging along the home-bound track
. . . just emptys cuming back.

—*mescal ike.*

DOPE

Dope, Hell yes! I took that stuff—
Made me feel like nothin' mattered;
I seemed to always have enough.
But now! My dreams and me are shattered!

Not through my nose, or in my arm—
Not sniffed, or smoked, or drank, or eaten—
The way I took it does more harm—
Makes a guy feel twiced as beaten!

Then how? I took it from her eyes—
Sweet as cake wit' choc'late frostin'
Black and clean as starry skies—
God! The dreams that I was lost in!

And now—I can't get it no more!
Them shots she gimme wit' her glances
Sure made my heart run on all four—
But I ain't cured—God! What's my chances?

—Boy Brown.

HUNGER

We have no need of prayer,
We have no need of fear.
We have no need of poems
If only God's to hear.

If only God's to hear,
We have no need of song;
Only a passionate heart
And hunger all day long.

—Norman Strand.

SEPTEMBER VILLANELLE

There's a darker red in the last, late rose,
A shadowed blooming, a close-held scent;
There's a somber hush in the garden close.

What is the secret the garden knows?
Why are the heads of the blossoms bent?
There's a darker red in the last, late rose,

At the foot of the garden the fountain flows,
Its play half-hearted, its fullness spent;
There's a somber hush in the garden close.

Under the eaves, where the robins doze,
Echoes the note of a faint lament—
There's a darker red in the last, late rose.

Like a star at twilight the moon-flower glows,
The dusk is full of a strange portent;
There's a somber hush in the garden close.

Through the falling petals the dawn wind blows,
By a rift of flame is the cold sky rent!
There's a darker red in the last, late rose,
There's a somber hush in the garden close.

—Iris.

REMINDER

See, I am beaten down
Like a leaf beneath the rain,
Like a tree beneath the storm;
But I will arise again.

I will arise and find
The power behind the pain.
In proud humility
I will arise again.

I am too dulled to weep,
And prayers are dust to the rain,
But when this day is done
I will arise again.

—Nancy Shores.

A LADY OF TROY

You piled the cup of the slender moon
With kisses, high on high;
And those who loved you touched its edge
With their lips as it passed them by.

You spilled your kisses against the trees
And down upon the sand,
Where a cinnamon moon swung low, so low,
Above a drowsy land.

. . . . . .

The years have drained the slender moon
Of kisses, high on high;
And the centuries have long been cold
Since you startled them with a sigh.

But some still love beneath the trees
And down beside the sand,
Where a cinnamon moon swings low, so low,
Above a sleeping land!

—DONFARRAN.

DISCOVERY

I sang a little song. You said
'Twas much too sad,
And begged me for a gayer one
To make you glad.

So, laughingly, to suit your mood,
I touched the strings

And tore from them all vestige of
Unhappy things.

Now you are gone I sometimes sing
Both melodies.
I weep or smile with each again.
None knows,—none sees.

And you? . . . I heard you humming as
I passed you by.
It was the wistful song . . . the one
Which made you . . . sigh!

—Grace Starbuck.

NOUVEAU ROI

I have a desert island in a sapphire, tossing sea,
With a beach of sand-white pebbles and a lone banana tree;
There's a puppy and a kitten and a parrot that can swear,
And a lot of useful things that I am taking with me there.

There's a frying pan, some matches, some fishing lines and hooks,
Three pipes and fresh tobacco, and half a ton of books,
A notebook, and a pencil and a tenor-banjo there—
And the Queen of Sixty-third Street with a pansy in her hair.

—The Dauber.

KNOWLEDGE

I have seen flaming tulips
Potted in a jade green jar

Open scarlet lips
To the windowed sun and sky.

I have seen a strange gray thing
Creep up into their glowing . . .

And so, I know that love can die.

—PIERROT.

One can hardly read such illustrative matter without becoming a believer in column verse. It runs the gamut all the way from hilarity to the most sober of sentiment. It may be in almost any form and upon almost any subject.

To attempt to tell how to write such verse would be the height of folly and presumption. All that one could try to do would be to point out the obvious characteristics. The close student will note that column verse is mechanically perfect and that it is always smooth, if not always musical. It plays upon human heart strings, as does other poetry, but it does not allow itself to become maudlin. Perhaps the humorous quality of the column as a whole saves it from that.

But pointing out characteristics is not telling "how to do." Much reading, much imitation, much practice, and much growing urge for originality may make a good column verse writer of a person naturally inclined to verse writing. Further than that, one dares not say.

XI

The Light Essay

HE little essay (or longer paragraph) frequently found in the so-called humorous column might, if one were in a good humor, be said to be the natural result of the columnist's irrepressible desire to editorialize, to give to the world his opinion about something. If one were in an acridly critical frame of mind, one might say that the longer paragraph is the natural result of the columnist's inability to be epigrammatic. But whatever one might say, the fact remains that the vest-pocket essay has firmly established itself as a favorite vehicle for many good column writers.

Indeed, some of the very best column writers fill their space with three or four short essays, or maybe with just one essay. The column-long light essay is undoubtedly a temptation to the columnist. It is pleasant now and then to allow oneself 800 to 1,200 words in which to straighten out and really get under way. It is a relief from the terrible daily strain of being terse and epigrammatic, and slamming out a hit every time one goes to bat. And

it is quite often a relief to the reader, for nothing is more destructive to one's mental appetite than too much pepper.

Perhaps we might say that columnists who dare, do fill their space with light essays. It is easy to please with sure-fire wheezes, jingles, or epigrams; but it is not easy to write in patient, essay style and retain the attention of the average newspaper reader. The light essay writer has a two-fold task. He must be occasionally epigrammatic and continuously sparkling, and at the same time be coherent, logical, and steadily progressive with his thinking. If he lets down for more than a very few lines, his readers desert him.

For subject matter for light essays a capable writer need never be at a loss. Light essays may be about anything, even more than feature stories may be about anything. One may visit one's second or third cousin up in the mountains of West Virginia and find enough copy for a week of columns in the points of view and the antics of the relatives. One may read a new play by Theodore Dreiser or Eugene O'Neill, or be bothered by mosquitos or saxophones, or listen to a Chautauqua spellbinder, or be taken on a picnic by one's wife. One may be called down by the boss or by a reader who always enjoyed the column until day before yesterday. There is no way of knowing what is going to provoke a light essay. If there are sermons in stones —and great minds have agreed that there are— there are light essays in the tiniest of pebbles.

Politics, sports, and fashions furnish a plentiful source of supply to the person who would write light essays. The essay is the opportunity of the writer who has trained himself to have opinions about things and develop those opinions. A good essayist is a man or woman who has the patience to develop his opinions until they either cohere or bubble away into nothingness. Whims, fancies, and prejudices affixed to either the writer or his readers are good points of departure.

The nature of the so-called humorous column, however, makes some rather stringent demands upon the essays that seek admission. In the first place the thought must "get away" quickly and pleasingly. This is only a way of saying that the main theme must be introduced early, interestingly, and rather unexpectedly. There is no time nor place for the painstaking and often painful introduction that is necessary in debate and allowable in the serious essay. The column reader is always eager to go. He has turned to the column either because he cannot abide the formidable-looking editorials or because he has grown tired of wading through them. He wants action right from the start.

The column reader does not propose to do irksome mental labor as he goes through the little essay. He expects to run along easily and rapidly. Consequently the writer must urge the thinking along at a brisk canter. The columnist's thinking must have speed as well as interest. There must

be a movement of thought akin to that found in the very best of advertising copy, a rapid movement so smooth that the reader is almost entirely unconscious of any movement. Every other sentence or so must ring a bell or score a point or do something to indicate that an advance has been made. The column reader is constantly "calling for a touchdown."

There is still another demand that the nature of the humorous column makes upon the light essay. It is that the writer sign off promptly and undeniably the moment his work is finished. The column reader will not endure *post mortem* discussion. He is more than willing to wait until tomorrow for an encore or a second helping if there has to be one. He is just as insistent about a sudden and fitting finish as he is about a sudden and interesting beginning. Filler and padding bore him. There are numerous other places in the newspaper where he can find them if he wants them.

How long, then, should an essay in a humorous column be? That depends upon the writer's ability to hold the reader's interest. And nine times out of ten the writer's ability to hold interest depends upon his ability to introduce new, relevant matter that seems to be essential to a fair and pleasant consideration of the subject. An essay may run to the bottom of the page if the writer can keep the interest ablaze that long. But the writer must watch carefully for the first symptoms of smolder-

ing. Dullness at any point is sure to prove disastrous. It is always best to stop two or three sentences this side of dullness.

All of which means, of course, that an essay in a humorous column should be just long enough to reach the end—not of the column, but of the essay. Padding is not merely inadvisable; it is positively dangerous. Feature writers may indulge in it and story writers may indulge in it, particularly if their precious reputations are already made; but the column writer must be very, very careful, no matter how secure his reputation—and his job—may be.

Largely then, the light essay writer's task is that of developing a style that is uniformly interest-holding. And style, whatever else may be and has been said about it, is the sum of two things: A distinctive outlook on life and a distinctive manner of expressing that outlook. Bert Leston Taylor had style, Franklin P. Adams has it. Ring Lardner, who is not technically a columnist but might easily be, has it in abundance. Read the work of these men, and of others you may know, and in a surprisingly short time you will begin to see that they have found for their respective philosophies of life, manners of expression that fit snugly.

The only way to achieve style is to write much and often, and watchfully wait and pray. Style insists on a long period of infancy—it refuses to be forced. The best thing that can be done to rush it, besides the necessary apprenticeship of writing, is

plenty of reading. Style is usually found somewhere between third base and home. And one has to work one's way around.

The following examples of "column" essays have been selected to show range in subject matter, treatment, and style. Nothing else is claimed for them —except that they are good, and entertaining.

Here are two brief ones by Jay E. House. They are, it happens, on two of his favorite subjects, baseball and domesticity; and they bear witness to his avowed theory and practice of injecting himself without reserve into his column.

Notice how successful he is at arousing interest.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

Reluctant as we are to do it, we shall make the tiresome and exhausting journey to Washington. Our plight is comparable to that of the town drunkard. He can't quit liquor; we can't quit baseball. Either will take the synthetic stuff if he can get no other. But synthetic baseball is on our nerves. We dropped in casually on the old family doctor Thursday night. "Why!" he said, "you're as nervous as a cat." "Synthetic baseball," we replied. "I can't stand it." For if, as we have frequently alleged, the spectators at a ball game annoy us, the radio announcers drive us wild. It is almost inconceivable that anybody could know as little about anything as they know about baseball.

If we should stand up in front of a large audience and attempt to conduct a symphony orchestra, the people would laugh themselves sick. Did we try to explain to them the inner workings of a motor car, they'd die of ennui. But

a radio announcer can say "Barnhart bingled to Peckinpaugh and was thrown out by Judge." And get away with it. We can't stand that sort of thing through a series. So we're going to Washington and gosh, how we hate it!

A good many have written to combat E. T.'s theory of the marital contract. Most of them were men who admitted that their wives had made them. What we want to say about it is that it is perfectly all right with us. If a man is sucker enough to admit that his wife made him, we should worry. Usually it is a pretty poor job and reflects no credit on anybody, but that is beside the point.

The theme has a thousand ramifications. The practice of giving the credit to the "little woman" is of comparatively recent origin. It was originally a play to the gallery, and still is. Some sentimentalist conceived the thoroughly sound notion that he could enhance his own values by crediting them to the "little woman." It was a sound notion, because the people literally lap up that sort of pish-posh. The sheep followed his lead. Now pretty nearly everybody is admitting it. But few of them really believe it. It is just a good pose out of pseudo-chivalry by self-esteem.

And there is some truth in the contention that women make men. A man's life consists of a series of parades for the benefit of the ladies. He strives and strains and tugs at the problems of existence that he may impress some woman or give some woman something that she wants. To the average man success and glory are secondary achievements —desirable, of course, but of secondary interest. A woman can't help him much in a practical way, but she is, to a considerable extent, the inspiration of his efforts. We know, because we happen to be writing now to impress the women.

We do it right along. We want them to think we are a crusty, cynical, hard-boiled dinosaurus. As long as they think that, we can keep them interested in the column. As long as women are interested in the column we shall have a job writing it.

In the practical work of getting out the column no woman is or can be of the slightest assistance to us. It all hinges on our ability to perform and our determination to achieve. The ability to perform is, of course, inherent. How much the determination to achieve is fixed in a desire to impress some woman, or many women, is an open question and a very interesting one.

Jay E. House originally came from Kansas. Here is something else from Kansas by a writer who stays there. For some years Miss Jennie S. Owen has written a column once or twice a week in the El Dorado *Times*. Notice how entertainingly she writes about one of the most prosaic of all things.

GOING AFTER THE COWS

Going after the cows was one of the many tasks required of us in childhood by parents who must have believed that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

We remember that old herd just as we drove them up the old lane from the pasture at the far corner of the farm. There was old "Lil," who was as black as the ace of spades. She gave blue milk and was always in disfavor with the hired men because she was known as a "hard milker." And then there was the old red muley cow which would hide in the thicket and endure the sting of insects rather than shake the

tell-tale bell and disclose her hiding place. Old "Jersey," a gentle-mannered animal with soft eyes which bespoke an ancestry distantly removed from the little island off the coast of France. And then there was "Snowball," in whose veins coursed the blood of explorers. "Snowball," like some folks, always thought the grass grew greener just over the hill, and often we found her roaming in the cornfield. She wore a heavy yoke made from a forked limb—the badge of her refractoriness.

It was a long walk and it came at the time of day when we were weary from work and play. When the woodbox and reservoir had been replenished, the chickens fed and the eggs gathered, then it was time to go for the cows. It was a lonely walk, too, for we were not even allowed to take old Shep with us lest we might hurry the bossies too fast. How slow they were—stopping to munch grass leisurely along the way as though they had not been all day on the pasture. How they would sometimes scatter out provokingly, making it difficult for one small girl to herd them into the narrow lane which led to the corral. The sandburs and nettles pricked our bare feet and we had to keep a sharp lookout for snakes, but always there were wild flowers along the way to tempt us to loiter, and even a small girl was not insensible to the glorious sunsets which were at their climax of beauty when it was time to go after the cows.

After supper when the dishes were washed and with father we sat under the tall cottonwoods through which the moonlight sifted, and listened to the rhythmical sound of the milk against the sides of the tin pail, a sort of benediction seemed to envelop us. Drowsily we would hear the crunch of the hired man's boots as he wearily strode toward the house, the click of the barnyard gate, the sound of milk being poured through the old tin strainer and would be stirred to wake-

fulness by mother's call, "Come drink your milk and wash your feet and get to bed. We must get up early in the morning."

It's a long way from El Dorado, Kansas, to Welfare Island, and it's a long way from bossy to the Easter bonnet. But the column essay has no concern at all for distance, and difference. Here is a picture of metropolitan institutional life, by Mann Hatton (Russel M. Crouse) of the "Sought, Seen, Heard" column in the New York *Evening Post.* The subject is different, the style is different; yet there is a subtle and important something that is not different.

SOUGHT, SEEN, HEARD

New Easter Hats All Around Make the Women on Welfare Island Feel as if "They Are Somebodys Again"

Fifth Avenue will have its Easter parade tomorrow with enough finery bedecking the heads of the peripatetic to frighten with mere color any rabbits that may have remained behind after their annual egg distribution.

But Welfare Island will have none. The women of the City Home will bob off to church with last year's hats, not a bit concerned over the fact that across the East River on the thoroughfare of thoroughfares the latest creations are on display.

For Welfare Island will have its new hat display in good time. Chaplain Sydney R. Ussher of the City Mission Society and Miss Sarah Jane Manahan, his assistant, declare the island is still a little East Sideish in its customs. So it

waits until Trinity Sunday, a couple of months later, for its parade.

Chaplain Ussher and Miss Manahan are responsible for the idea that the women of the City Home, almost a thousand of them, are as much entitled to new hats in the spring as those of Fifth Avenue. For several years they have seen that they got them. And this year will be no exception.

Last year a hat manufacturer contributed 1200 of them. Miss Manahan and others connected with the mission at the home supervised their trimming and not one of the women members of the home was without her new bonnet.

"The manufacturer was well paid for his contribution in the remark of just one of the women," says Mr. Ussher. "She put on her new hat and looked at herself in a mirror. 'At last I feel I'm some one again,' she said."

Trimming days are always the busy ones. Some of the women have their own trimmings—priceless little things they have taken with them when they moved to the island to spend their declining years. They busy themselves for weeks in advance of the big event.

Miss Manahan provides the rest of the things that make the hats a bit perky. Last year she let fall a remark regarding the hat parade in a big department store. One of the owners heard it and it wasn't long until several departments were contributing odds and ends—bits of velvet and waste silk—to the hat parade.

Many a man's necktie has gone into the general scheme. And he wouldn't recognize it after it has been taken apart and ironed and sewed back as a band. Hair ribbons and odd bits of upholstery have proved as easily disguised.

The result is that the parade is by no means institutional

in its appearance. There aren't row after row of hats which might belong to a uniform.

"I went over last year," says Commissioner Bird S. Coler of the Department of Welfare, "expecting to see 1000 hats all alike in the parade. Instead there were as many, if not more, individual styles than I might have seen on Fifth Avenue Easter morning. No two hats were alike."

Which is more than can be said in advance for the avenue's promenade tomorrow. Each debutante—and even the dowagers—will devote more attention, probably, to eyeing her sisters in the dread fear of seeing her creation in replica.

Some of the women who are waiting to participate in the island's Trinity Sunday pageant of hats, once were participants in Fifth Avenue's Easter vanity display. If it comes to that there may be those who walk in finery tomorrow who may some day trim their own hats on the island. But those are stories that circumstances tell.

One of the inmates of the home, who recently died, once had all the Easter hats she wanted, and from the finest of shops. Her husband was a successful manufacturer. In fact he was so successful that when a trust came along and wanted to buy him out he laughed at the idea and said he'd take care of himself.

A financial battle followed. The trust undermined his prices. The income of $100,000 a year on which the man had supported a Fifth Avenue home began to drop. Eventually he was forced to give up his business entirely. His morale broken, he got into trouble. After a prison term he died. And his wife went to Welfare Island. And she changed her spring hat day from Easter to Trinity Sunday.

Another of the women there was once a milliner herself. For eighteen years she made the hats that graced Fifth

Avenue on Easter. And then things went wrong. Now she tries to help with the work of trimming hats for Trinity Sunday, but she's a little too old to be of real aid.

There are several women at the home who were once servants in the homes of wealthy families. But that was when they were younger. The heads of those houses are dead now. To be sure, they remembered faithful servants in the will, but only to the extent of $500 or so, and such sums do not last long when the recipients have given their best years in service. Earning capacities are lessened.

There is one who was a French maid in those early days when French maids were first fashionable. When she went to the home she left behind in a furnished room seven trunks of the things she had accumulated. They were sorted out and one trunkful followed her. The others, lovely bits of lace and such, brought only $150.

"They all look forward to their new spring hats," says Miss Manahan. "And come to chapel. It gives them a new grip on things somehow. Almost any woman will tell you that a new hat is sort of tonic. And so it is over here. We don't give them old cast-off hats, but new ones. That's part of the tonic."

So the Easter paraders tomorrow needn't hold their heads so high. Welfare Island will have its style show soon.

—Mann Hatton.

Keith Preston, of the "Hit or Miss" column in the Chicago *News*, does not often indulge in essaying; but when he does, he usually succeeds. Here are two examples of his work, both of them based upon news stories.

Dr. Roy Chapman Andrews announces a new expedition in search of the missing link. There remain two excuses for the exploring career today—the south pole, having been found twice already, is not considered fair game. The north pole, which has been found only once, is still in the ring, but conscientious explorers prefer the missing link, which has never been found at all. Also an explorer in search of the missing link is not confined to any particular locality or climate. He can dig for it in any quarter of the globe he particularly fancies. It is even possible that the missing link may yet be found at the North pole.

Twenty-seven Americans are on this year's ticket for the New York university hall of fame, of whom only twelve can be elected. The candidates are all good men, as far as we know, although many of them we don't know, but they all have good Nordic names. Although it may be too early for an accurate forecast, the following look like favorites in the early betting:

William Penn is sure to carry Pennsylvania and will cop the pacifist vote in other states. Noah Webster has the cross-word puzzle vote in his pocket, and should prove an easy winner. Sidney Lanier will beat Walt Whitman for the chair of poetry. Sid has a strong following in the southern states, and can count on conservative support also from Coolidge republicans. "The King of the Black Isles" has recently come out for him on the Wednesday book page. Walt will carry only Wisconsin, the near north side, and what is left of Greenwich village, according to that shrewd observer, William Hard, Jr.

Paul Revere and Phil Sheridan will ride in on the support of Gen. Dawes and the American Legion, Paul Leach declares. John Paul Jones also looks good, according to the

Admiral (Ret.) David Lawrence and Samuel Blythe ventures the prediction that Stonewall Jackson will carry the solid south.

Dark horses at this writing are Adoniram Judson, missionary, and Horace Bushnell, theologian. Both will lose many modernist votes on the report that their candidacy has been indorsed by William Jennings Bryan. Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford) will receive a large woman's vote on the strength of his excellent baking powder.

One of the frequent contributors to the "Line o' Type or Two" column of the Chicago *Tribune* is Snowshoe Al. Recently he must have run afoul of some up-to-the-minute model of sheik. Read this, and picture to yourself what became of the model.

A ESSAY ON THA SHEEK

By Snowshoe Al.

It wuz rainin'. Me an' Buzzard Bill wuz standin' in a doorway, watchin' sumthin' walkin' toward us. This "sumthin' " had on wun uv them yaller transparent raincotes wot maiks a persun look like tha suksessfil maniger uv a hawg-farm. This hombre tripped along grasefully like he had jist got a shot uv "sweet dreems" in tha arm. "Wot is it?" sez Buzz. "That," sez I, "is a man. Man, as yuh are probibly awair, is tha graitest uv tha earth's livin' things." "Aw, hell," sez Buzz, "I kin find better livin' things than this wun by turnin' over stones." Jist then tha rain stopt, an' tha butterfly emerged frum tha kukoon. Hoppin' out uv tha raincote an' throwin' it over his arm, he stood fourth in tha gorgeus splendar uv a beeyootiful red necktie, an' a

gray soot wot had 14 yards uv cloth in tha pants. "Aha!" sez Buzz ter me, "wun uv them birds wot calls his boy chum dearie." Jist then his komic valentine stops in frunt uv us. "Dearie," sez he ter Buzz, "kin yew tell me tha time?" If enywun will give us 2 bucks fer tha raincote, we'll throw in tha red necktie, but nuthin' kood indoose us ter part with tha trick pants. We're gonna keep 'em as a sooveneer.

Every time any prominent man or woman says anything about the well known sense of humor, all good columnists get ready to come to the aid of their party. Read here what Sir Philip Gibbs provoked Franklin P. Adams into saying. This example well represents the type of tiny essay that most columnists enjoy writing. It might be objected, of course, that one over-dignifies a blurb like this when he calls it an essay; but we must not quarrel about a little thing like that.

In the London Times Sir Philip Gibbs has been writing on "Is England Done?" No, is his answer in sum. But he says, "The only thing we can bank on now is the sense of humor, the hatred of hot air, the underlying steadiness, of that average man who showed his quality in the last war, and won it for us." We object. The average man's—English, American, German, or any other nation—sense of humor and his hatred of hot air are nothing to bank on. The average man has little sense of humor, if any; and there is nothing he loves better than hot air. If you want to become a Big Operator, sell Average Man's Sense of Humor short.

As proof of the fact that the average man loves hot air,

observe how he swells with pride when somebody, confident of his enjoyment of it, tells him he hates it.

One of the most consistent addicts to essay writing—of short, medium or long duration—is Heywood Broun. His "It Seems to Me" column in the New York *World* truly lives up to its title line, and many things seem to seem to Mr. Broun. The fact that he leaps from a review of D. H. Lawrence's *St. Mawr* to an intimate consideration of the petty jealousies of children is good evidence that what to write about next causes him little dismay. And what to write about next is a thing that must not worry columnists who are devotees of the little essay.

Here are three of Mr. Broun's short essays:

IT SEEMS TO ME

By Heywood Broun

I love nature, but I do think it can be overdone. There is so much sympathy for dumb animals along Hunting Ridge that human rights are neglected. Yesterday, for instance, I was stung by a bee and everybody around blamed me. There was much indignation when I killed him, even though I exhibited the bite and pleaded self-defense.

They all said that bees were never known to adopt aggressively hostile action. The theory was that I must have frightened him. Indeed, the community sentiment appeared to be that I had nagged and bullied the insect until he lashed out in righteous anger.

The truth of the matter is that I didn't do a thing to

that bee up to the time I killed him. No honest witness can testify that there were sounds of an altercation before the blow was struck.

At the time of his attack I was sitting on a rock very quietly engaged in fishing. The bee persisted in bumping into me. Round about were acres and acres of land unoccupied by man or beast. Within twenty yards there lay a large field of clover. It is true that the bee seemed to be fiying in that direction, but he could hardly have asserted with any justice that I had him completely stymied from his destination.

It would have been a simple matter for him to have flown around me or over my head. As far as I know, there is nothing in the tradition of bees which compels them invariably to fly in a straight line. It's crows who are committed to keeping faith with Euclid. And as a matter of fact, even crows do turn heretical and circle around at times.

But this bee was bull-headed and nothing would do him except to fly straight through me, since I bisected the straight line which he planned to follow. I don't know whether he thought I would eventually part like the Red Sea or whether he purposed tunneling, but three times he flew bang against the upper right hand side of my chest.

Not until after the third collision did I speak to him at all, and then it was in the mildest sort of way which should not have caused him either anger or fear.

What I said was, "If I were you I wouldn't do that any more."

And at that he flew into a terrific rage or panic and stung me. Upon that instant, I confess, a primitive instinct overpowered me. I am not going to pretend that I didn't know my own strength or that I merely tried to wound him. I struck to kill and under the same circumstances I would do

it again. A bee is all right as long as he behaves himself and I hope the issue will not arise again.

In order to avoid confusion in future, I shall have my chest tattooed in large and legible letters reading, "No thoroughfare."

D. H. Lawrence's "St. Mawr" is being advertised as a book which should be read by every lover of horses. This may prove misleading. Some might buy it in the belief that here was another tale after the manner of "Black Beauty." But when "Black Beauty" was written, psychoanalysis had not yet been invented. An interest in Freud will carry the reader much further into "St. Mawr" than a love of horses. Still it is not a complicated book. To me it is one of the simplest of Lawrence's novels and it is a book of great beauty and some passion. And yet it is marred. I find it a tired book. Mr. Lawrence loses interest before he is done. Toward the end all the characters stretch and say, "Ho, hum!" And D. H. Lawrence said the same thing, but a good deal earlier in the book.

Children are curious with their petty jealousies and all that. H. 3d was mad all through, yesterday, because his friend Justin caught a fish and he caught none. I tried to point out to him how silly that was. After all, I had been fishing in the same party and caught nothing. And I wasn't mad. After all, Justin had the best tackle and the best spot on the bank and the best luck. And, anyhow, it wasn't a very big fish. What do I care whether he caught more fish than I did? I can go out any afternoon and catch twice as many. It's too silly to get jealous about things like that. What would I want with a fish of that size, anyway? That sort I always throw back. I wish H. 3d could mature

enough to be like me and take his fishing calmly and without rancor. And besides I did have a big fish almost hooked when Justin shouted. That was the way he managed to catch more fish than I did.

As has frequently been pointed out, the reader of this volume is supposed to be an omnivorous reader of columns. What is said here is only intended to guide. There is not a single chapter, however, for which as much "outside reading" must be done as for this one. Obviously it is impossible to include many light essays. Column essay writers write about altogether too many things in altogether too many different styles and manners. Only by following many columns for months can one get a fair idea of what is true and what is not true of column essays of the little and light variety.

The most important thing about them has already been said. They are good so long as they are interesting, diverting—so long as they retain their grip on the reader's attention. For the most part they should be quite intimate—the ego, or personality, of the writer must not long remain out of the limelight. They may be about anything. They must stop two or three sentences before the border line of boredom is reached.

XII

The Personality of the Column

HE only fair and reliable judgment of a humorous column must be made on the column as a whole. The quality of the jingle, the epigrams, or the essays, or of any one of the vehicles employed by the columnist should not determine finally the rating of the column. There is a totality of effect, assembled from somewhere and defying analysis or even investigation, that seems to be almost entirely independent of the individual excellencies of the units that go to make up the column.

The final judgment of the column is a judgment of the personality of the column conductor. Knowing a column is much like knowing the mind of an individual. Personality is recruited from many interests, prejudices, approvals, whims, and fancies and from many manners of expressing such things. One has a tendency to think of certain things in certain ways and to express the results of his thinking in certain manners. All these tendencies taken together make up one's personality.

The personality of a column is the resultant of

the admixture of subject matter, tone, variety, and methods of the column conductor plus the same things of the contributors. It is the conscious or unconscious purpose of the columnist functioning in his work. Most columnists deny having a purpose. It is to be noted, however (see Chapter IV), that many of them betray the fact that they do have one —and that not so very long after they plead not guilty. The professional affectation of indifference and unseriousness in their columns misleads them. No man can write to a large group of readers day after day for months upon end without ultimately developing a desire to do something more than entertain them. A bareback rider or a tumbler may stop at this point, but a column conductor cannot. Even a good circus clown evolves a purpose.

Most columnists use a blunderbuss to project their thinking into their readers. They assemble epigrams, jingles, verse, paragraphs, and light essays of their own coinage, mix them with contributions from the four quarters of their reading public, call it a column, and shoot. They are conscious of the fact that they must entertain. They are also conscious of the fact that they must have variety so that they may please many kinds of readers. They avoid the appearance of "unity" and "purpose" as a cat avoids a bath. A solitary column of theirs looks formless and purposeless. But a month of their columns indicates that the purposelessness and the formlessness and the lack of unity have been apparent only, and not real. In most cases a month of

columns will betray a distinct and unvarying sort of what we have to call personality working with what we have to call a purpose, whether we like to or not.

Other columnists are not so fearful of the appearance of solid matter and monotony. They are willing even to trust one subject to carry them and their readers clear to the bottom of the page. They place their faith in delightful turns of thought, and do not think it necessary always to be varying the form and the type and the line length. Undoubtedly they have in mind a body of readers with better powers of concentration and endurance; but at the same time it is difficult positively to prove that one body of newspaper readers is vastly different from another.

We must conclude, therefore, that all columnists achieve a "sort" of unity, whether they dare to or not, and that all columns evolve a "sort" of personality and purpose, whether the writers admit it or not. It would be unwise to conclude, however, that the purpose is a "set" purpose, for the evidence of both the columns and the columnists indicates that the purpose is evolved and unconscious rather than set and studied. The determination of the purpose of a column is not a problem for either the columnist or his reader. It is a problem for the student of columning.

For the most part a solitary column has as short a span of life as the report of a baseball game or a row in the United States senate. But we must

remember that the column has to reappear the next day, and the next, and that it is therefore likely to develop a personality, whether or no. It is in the long string of columns that the personality appears.

The attitude of the columnist toward his reading public is a marked one. He may be chummy with his readers, take them closely into his confidence, and write to them intimately of intimate things. He may use "you" and "I," or the editorial "we," until the reader feels himself engaging in a fireside chat instead of reading a paper. Or the columnist may go to the other extreme and apparently ignore his readers, tossing his material out with seemingly no concern as to whether anybody ever looks at it. He may choose subjects and employ manners that highbrow, it would seem, at least nine-tenths of the readers of his paper. Or he may assume a nonchalant attitude and appear half in earnest and half not. Or he may indulge in the great American sport of "kidding." He may treat you in any way that a human being may treat you.

But close or distant, the columnist is watchfully conscious of effects. He betrays evidences of wondering about the reception of what he has to say. He is concerned about the readers who so seldom tell him what they think, that group of followers so seemingly unresponsive. All these evidences have to be read between his lines. To let them appear elsewhere means concern, and defeat. The

columnist knows that he must secure results without seeming to care whether or no he does.

There is only one demand that is made upon all columns. They must be entertaining. In the word "entertaining," however, lies a good deal of territory. The human race derives its entertainment from sources too numerous to attempt to estimate. Bugs Baer entertains with his Bug-a-boos, Man Hatton entertains with a long, informative feature on some phase of metropolitan life, Jay House makes his very grouches delightful, Richard Henry Little edifies the "Line o' Type or Two" readers with contributed verse from some of the most pleasing verse writers in America; surely no greater spread of entertainment could be asked for. Yet the columns of each of these writers have personality and unity. No matter how far afield they may go, columnists must take their prejudices along. And they always bring them back in the finished columns.

As has been pointed out in several places throughout this volume, the average column reader expects the so-called humorous column to be humorous. What he considers humor may be only a light (or dark, maybe) unserious tone. Any intimate and keen exposure of life or living is likely to seem funny to one who has been reading news stories, features, and the common run of editorials. Any honest self-analysis, for instance, is almost sure to strike the ordinary individual, who is guiltless of such mind play, as being queer enough to be called "funny."

Consequently many columnists, who make not the slightest admission of trying to be funny, are considered unusually clever humorists.

On the other hand, or rather from the other end, most writers of columns plead guilty to the charge of trying to write humor. If not actually posing as "funny" men, they at least are willing to be considered strange, droll fellows. Many of them, indeed, go to unreasonable pains to indicate that they are writing "funny" columns. But they are not, nor do they pretend to be, humorists in the sense that the comic strip writers are humorists. They realize that they are appealing more to the intellect and less to the instincts and emotions.

When the so-called humorous column is not humorous, it usually relies on some sure human-interest appeal. The writer, though not trying to amuse, does his best to entertain by writing of things that readily connect with the sympathies, approvals, or basic interests of men and women. This type of column writer is, of course, doing nothing more nor less than the feature writer who specializes in human interest stories; but he is doing it every day, and his personality gradually seeps in to his column. Many of the columns of the human-interest type are reminiscent, devoting themselves almost exclusively to the pleasant happenings of the days that are no more. Other writers sit in secluded spots by the side of the road and write of the folks that go by. Any human-interest column continued for a very long period, no matter what its subject matter, is

sure to take on the personality of the writer.

Charges are frequently brought that certain columns are highbrow and that other columns are lowbrow. People with a penchant for classifying are sure that they can readily sort any hodge-podge of columns into highbrow and lowbrow piles. Doubtless it is true that some columns depend for their life upon pleasing a large group of readers, unused to the ways of subtlety in humor; and that other, and fewer, columns aim at pleasing a small group of sophisticated, noticeably intelligent people, a localized intelligentsia.

But the thing that is significant is that such a classification is useless. The important thing is that columns, nine times out of ten, are highbrow or lowbrow because their conductors are highbow or lowbrow. A still more important thing to be noticed is that columns rarely progress from subtle to broad, but often turn from broad to subtle and sophisticated. Subtle humor in America seems to be gravitating to the better class of so-called humorous columns and to essays in the literary magazines.

Such tendencies, however, are vague and undemonstrable. As yet they must be felt and sensed rather than proved. For the editorial page humorous column is quite likely to contain anything. Humor, like joy, does not relish being confined. A true appreciation of the humor in a given column must be based on close acquaintanceship with the writer of that column. Only in a general sense may he be said to cater to the taste of his readers.

In all major and minor particulars he determines their tastes. He prints what he pleases and makes 'em read it—and like it. He is the column. No other newspaper writer is in his class.

As was observed a good many pages back, the only excuse for a column is a man or a woman who can produce one steadily—and prosper. That is why the classifying of columns and of material in columns is a bit foolish. For every time one finds a really good column conductor one is almost sure to find a new type of column. The so-called humorous column is the most personal thing in the American newspaper. It has come to the front rapidly because it is about the only really personal thing left in the American newspaper.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is based on the design of Caslon. It is generally conceded that William Caslon (1692–1766) brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection and while certain modifications have been introduced to meet changing printing conditions, the basic design of the Caslon letters has never been improved. The type selected for this book is a modern adaptation rather than an exact copy of the original Caslon. The principal difference to be noted is a slight shortening of the ascending and descending letters to accommodate a larger face on a given body-size.

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